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# Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches: Book Proposal

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# Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches: Book Proposal

## **Abstract**

This capstone project for the University of Pennsylvania Masters in Applied Positive Psychology program begins with a book prospectus that briefly describes the book's proposed content, target audience, market potential, competitive works and author's experience. This is followed by an annotated table of contents that gives a detailed outline of the entire work. Finally, there are two sample chapters that can also serve as stand-alone tools for coaches as they apply the positive psychology principles in their coaching practices. The sample chapters include Gratitude and Visualization. The framework for each chapter includes 9 sections: Definitions and Descriptions, Research, Coaching Rationale, Live Cases, Dealing with Resistance, Assessments, Activities and Exercises, Resources, and References.

## **Keywords**

Positive Psychology, Coaching, Coach, Gratitude, Visualization, MAPP, Capstone, Book Proposal, Tools, Intervention

## **Disciplines**

Psychology

## **Comments**

Giffen, D.C. and Zhivotovskaya, E. (2007). Positive psychology toolkit for coaches: Book proposal. Unpublished masters thesis, University of Pennsylvania.

Running Head: MAPP 800: THE POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY TOOLKIT FOR COACHES

Capstone Project:

The Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches

Deb Giffen and Emiliya Zhivotovskaya

University of Pennsylvania

Professor Chris Peterson & Professor James Pawelski

MAPP 800

July 31, 2007

### Capstone Project Introduction

We've heard the question countless times from family, friends and colleagues since we first entered the MAPP program: "What *is* applied positive psychology?" At first we focused on defining positive psychology, and over the last year MAPP prepared us well for this. But now the focus is shifting to application, and a more challenging question has emerged. How can we apply what we've learned to make positive psychology's scientific research more accessible so that its life-enhancing insights on gratitude, optimism, flow, strengths, and resiliency, will be adopted and used by more people throughout the world?

An answer that expands our impact well beyond our personal reach is to help put these tools into the hands of the rapidly-expanding community of professional coaches, who share positive psychology's dedication to enhancing human flourishing. We will accomplish this through *The Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches*. We begin with a prospectus that briefly describes the book's contents, target audience, market potential, competitive works and author's experience. This is followed by an annotated table of contents that gives a detailed outline of the entire work. Finally, we provide two sample chapters that can also serve as stand-alone tools for coaches as they apply the positive psychology principles in their coaching practices.

The two tools highlighted in this proposal are gratitude and visualization. We selected gratitude because it has been extensively researched by prominent positive psychologists, and it has one of the highest correlations with happiness and well-being. Visualization was selected because it is a newly emerging positive psychology tool, with limited but encouraging empirical research to back it up. Since these tools are both commonly used by coaches, and yet span the two extremes in terms of empirical validation, it will allow us to show how the Toolkit will address both well-researched and less-well-researched topics.

### Book Prospectus

The Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches is a trade publication that provides business and personal coaches with proven, research-based tools and techniques for increasing their clients' well-being, happiness and success. Written for active coaches and other professionals who use coaching in their practices, the book provides practical solutions that coaches can immediately use with their clients, in an easy-to-access reference format. It also provides summaries of the latest research showing how and why the techniques are effective.

#### *Toolkit Overview*

The subject of positive psychology is receiving significant media attention because it approaches psychology from new perspective—with a focus on human flourishing, happiness and well-being. Pioneered by Professor Martin Seligman, positive psychology takes a strengths-based approach that studies specific ways people can build on their talents, skills and values in ways that lead to greater happiness, success and fulfillment in life. The Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches (Toolkit) takes the latest research on positive psychology and distills it into easily-accessible “chunks” of information, activities and assessments that can be immediately applied in coaching situations. The tools include well-researched positive psychology topics such as gratitude, optimism, hope, goal-setting, visualization, leveraging strengths, values clarification, forgiveness, mindfulness, flow, relationship building, choice, persistence, resiliency, and life meaning and purpose.

Within the Toolkit, the tools are arranged in a user-friendly framework that corresponds to the typical phases and goals of coaching relationships:

- Initial Assessment – assessing the client's current state, strengths and resources
- Setting Goals – clarifying the client's goals and objectives and defining success

- Accepting Reality – reducing the energy drains that come from fighting the current situation
- Building Positives – enhancing and leveraging the client’s strengths, optimism, hope, gratitude and success patterns
- Reducing Negatives – diminishing negative thinking and limiting beliefs and building persistence and resiliency
- Enhancing Relationships – broadening and building connections at home and work
- Creating Meaningful Contributions – identifying the client’s mission, purpose or calling, finding meaningful ways to serve, and achieving results

Although each tool is a part of this larger framework, it can effectively stand alone as an independent unit so that a coach can quickly use the tool in a “real-time” coaching situation. This stand-alone feature also makes it easy for coaches to re-purpose all or part of the tool as a short article or handout for their clients, and gives coaches a well-researched set of resources for creating presentations or classes on the topic. A listing of each of the tools and how they fit into the coaching framework can be found in the Annotated Table of Contents section.

#### *Tool Overview*

Each tool follows a standardized framework, which allows coaches to quickly find the aspects of the tool that are most useful at the moment. The framework includes 9 sections:

- **Definitions and Descriptions**– what it is and how it works as defined and described by leading researchers
- **Research** on the subject – what scientists have discovered through empirical research about the topic and its effects on people
- **Rationale** for including the topic in coaching engagements – why it works from a positive psychology perspective
- **Live Case** – one or more client scenarios showing how the topic can be used as a coaching tool
- **Resistance** – why clients might resist the topic in their lives and what to do about it
- **Assessments** for measuring and monitoring changes in clients related to the topic

- **Activities** – a variety of exercises, initiatives and practices a client can use to increase their happiness and well-being by practicing or leverage this topic in their lives
- **Resources** – Articles, books, websites and other resources for further information on this topic for coaches and clients
- **References** – The sources used as the knowledge foundation for this tool

As a quick example, here is how a coach might use the *gratitude* tool in a coaching engagement. When the coach encounters a situation where her client wants to be happier with his life, she would turn to Building Positives section of the toolkit. There, she would learn that positive psychology research has shown that gratitude is highly correlated with happiness, well-being and satisfaction with life, making it an excellent starting place for her work with the client. Turning to the Gratitude tool, she would find the foundational knowledge she needs: definitions and descriptions of gratitude as well as up-to-date research on the importance of gratitude to happiness and well-being. After she was briefed on the subject, she could use empirically-tested gratitude assessments to check her client's level of gratitude. If the assessments showed that the client would benefit from work in this area, she would have access to a variety of proven activities the client can use to increase his level of gratitude, as well as tips and guidance for the coach on when and how to use the activities with her client. Case studies would give her clear examples of how other coaches worked with clients on gratitude. If her client was resistant to any part of the process, she could find suggestions on how to resolve the issues. She would also find a range of additional articles, books, links and resources that she can use herself and share with her client. This lets them tailor the gratitude work specifically to the client's interests and needs which increases his long-term success. To monitor progress and measure success, the client could take the initial assessments again after practicing the gratitude activities for a while. This quantitative measure, combined with the client's qualitative experience with gratitude,

would help the coach and client decide how well the gratitude work was achieving the client's objectives, and determine if future work with gratitude would add value. At any time in the process, the coach or client could use the reference section if they wanted to find and explore any of the empirical research on which the gratitude tool is based.

### *Authors' Experience*

Deb Giffen has been coaching entrepreneurs, executives and professionals for over 14 years and is a Master Certified Coach through the International Coach Federation. She was a founding member of Coaches Certification Institute, a coach training company, and served on its board of directors and as a senior trainer from 1998 to 2003. With design partner Michael Stratford, she co-developed the material for over 150 hours of coach training workshops and is an active member and advisor in several professional coaching organizations. Deb is also Director of Executive Programs at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, one of the world's leading business schools, where she designs and manages a diverse portfolio of global leadership development programs for senior executives. At Wharton, she oversaw the launch of the Wharton Executive Coaching Workshop, a 5-day advanced development program for executive coaches, and she also leads the taskforce for integrating coaching into Wharton's executive programs. Deb is a graduate of the vanguard offering of Martin Seligman's Authentic Happiness Coaching Program in 2003 and has completed all coursework for the Masters in Applied Positive Psychology Masters in Applied Positive Psychology program at the University of Pennsylvania in October 2007.

Emiliya Zhivotovskaya also expects to earn her Masters in Applied Positive Psychology degree from the University of Pennsylvania in October 2007. She is a summa cum laude graduate from Long Island University's Honors Program where she completed her Bachelors of



Arts in Psychology and minored in Fine Art, Business and Philosophy in 2006. During her scholastic career, she earned seven academic awards and three four-year scholarships. Emiliya worked for New York Healthy Memory and Aging Services, where she conducted research in neurology, psychology and pathology, analyzed and collected data, carried out statistical analyses, and is published in a peer-reviewed journal. She uses her in -depth understanding of research and statistics to make coaching more empirically based. She has also worked for the National Council on Women's Health where she researched and wrote grant proposals, coordinated outreach programs to educate women in under-served communities on various health topics, and doubled the organization's membership. Emiliya has over 8 years of experience as an entertainer and co-business owner in the entertainment industry. She is a 200-hour Yoga Alliance certified yoga instructor. Emiliya is also a speaker and international coach.

*Target Market: Size, Potential and Accessibility*

The primary target market for the Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches includes personal, business and executive coaches. There are also strong secondary markets, because many corporate consultants, business executives and therapists are incorporating coaching modalities into their practices. This expansion of coaching into related professions, as well as the growth of the coaching profession itself, creates a sizable and growing market for the Toolkit.

The coaching profession has been growing exponentially over the last ten years and current research by PricewaterhouseCoopers offers a conservative estimate that there are over 30,000 coaches worldwide operating in a global coaching industry with annual revenues of \$1.5 billion. These figures do not include consultants, business managers and executives, and therapists who include coaching as part of their work.

In a 2006 article, Fast Company highlighted the “explosive growth” of executive coaching, citing research showing that 43% of CEOs and 71% of senior executive team members had worked with a coach. Sixty-three percent of the companies reported that they plan to increase their use of coaching over the next five years, and 92% of leaders being coached said they plan to use a coach again. The personal coaching industry is expanding at a similar rate, with life coaching becoming popularized as a main-stream topic by Dr. Phil featured on Oprah and Starting Over, the first reality TV show to be nominated for a Daytime Emmy Award.

As both the business and personal coaching populations grow, so does the potential for resources aimed at the coaches serving these populations. Market potential for a book targeted at both business and personal coaching audiences is exemplified by the best-selling current coaching reference book, *Co-Active Coaching*, which has a sales rank of approximately 3,400 on Amazon.com. Market potential, and its growth, can also be projected by looking at membership in the International Coach Federation, one of the leading professional associations for the coaching industry. ICF currently has over 12,000 members in 81 countries, as well as 155 local chapters which serve both members and non-member coaches. In the last 8 years, ICF membership has increased over 565% with a current annual growth rate of over 16%.

This target market could be reached through a variety of traditional marketing channels including space advertising in trade and professional publications, email outreaches, advertising in the leading e-newsletters and coaching blogs, and author appearances at conferences and events sponsored by a large number of coaching organizations. Marketing outreaches could also be targeted to the growing number of coach training organizations. Coaching tends to be a highly collaborative industry, and coaches readily share resources with one another. Word of mouth advertising has had a significant effect on the spread of coaching resources in the past,

and it is likely to continue to do so in the future. Deb Giffen has recently worked with Ed Keller, founder of Keller Fay Group, a leading word-of-mouth consulting company, and president of the Word of Mouth Marketing Association, and she can tap into his expertise in this area to accentuate the “buzz” in the coaching community for the Toolkit.

### *The Market Need*

Professional training for coaches has been in existence only since the early 1990’s and professional credentialing was non-existent until 1998 when it was instituted by the International Coach Federation. The number of research-based resources available for self-initiated coach training and development are also limited with just a handful of books, professional journals and trade publications available (see Exhibit A – Competitive Works). Many of the early coach training programs and resources were built on foundations that relied more on self-help literature than on academic or scientific research. This has led to concern from corporations and consumers about the effectiveness and professionalism of coaches, which is generating significant interest on the part of the coaching community to base their work on a solid empirical foundation. Coaches want proven, research-based solutions to address the key coaching needs of their clients. They also want those solutions to be in a “quick-reference” format that makes it easy to access and use with their clients, and easy for their clients to apply. The Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches will provide a practical easy-to-use reference to address these coaching needs. The book could also serve as a reference text for any of the 50 coach training programs accredited by the ICF, or the multitude of other coach training organizations that have not yet received ICF accreditation. In addition, it would be a valuable resource for corporate consultants, business managers or professional psychologists who are using coaching approaches in their careers or practices.

## **Exhibit A: Competitive Works**

### *Positive Psychology Coaching: Putting the Science of Happiness to Work for Your Clients*

by Robert Biswas Diener and Ben Dean

Description: Diener and Dean are two leading researchers in the field of Positive Psychology.

This work maps positive psychology progress in the context of a coaching dynamic. Readers learn how to enhance strengths, set goals, and utilize interventions to enhance their practice.

The authors demonstrate how positive psychology is a necessary bridge to take the burgeoning field of coaching to its next height. A weakness of this work is that coaches would need to read the whole book to understand how to apply these principles to their practice. The *Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches* is designed as stand-alone chapters and segments. Coaches can quickly flip through to find information that is relevant to them since each component of the chapter is distinguished and concise. Compared to *Positive Psychology Coaching*, the *Positive Psychology Toolkit* goes into greater detail about the mechanisms and research behind the tools. The *Positive Psychology Toolkit* also describes typical coaching phases, thus a novice coach can learn how to coach a client in addition to how positive psychology applies to their practice.

Hardcover: 258 pages

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (April 20, 2007)

ISBN-10: 047004246X

ISBN-13: 978-0470042465

### *Quality of Life Therapy: Applying a Life Satisfaction Approach to Positive Psychology and Cognitive Therapy*

by Michael B. Frisch

Description: This handbook, based on Frisch's Quality of Life Therapy (QOLT), is formatted as an easy-to-use toolkit designed to help therapists and mental health professionals facilitate the personal growth of their clients. Frisch combines traditional past-focused therapeutic techniques with the future-minded interventions to help clients work toward optimal functioning within seven dimensions of their lives. Strengths of this work include its abundance of activities and inventories provided in the enclosed "Toolbox CD". In addition, rigorous empirical studies of QOLT support its effectiveness as a whole. A weakness of the work from a competitive perspective is that it takes a therapeutic rather than a coaching approach, focusing more on what is wrong with clients and how to fix it, than on what is right with clients and how to optimize it. Frisch's focus is also more oriented on teaching the reader how to do his form of therapy, QOLT, rather than on giving them quick and practical information on how to enhance their current practice. Quality of Life Therapy comes with its own collection of terms and acronyms that become hard to follow. The QOLT handbook also fails to educate the reader about research within the field of positive psychology. That is, Frisch tells the readers to use gratitude with their clients, but does not explain how or why it works. The *Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches* is similar to this handbook in that it provides an abundance of assessments and exercises for practitioners to use with their clients. However, the *Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches* also educates coaches in the supportive research behind the tools so they understand the mechanisms behind the concepts and can more easily adapt the activities to fit the unique needs of individual clients.

Paperback: 368 pages

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (Dec 2, 2005)

ISBN-10: 0471213519

ISBN-13: 978-0471213512

*Emotional Intelligence in Action: Training and Coaching Activities for Leaders and Managers*

by Marcia M. Hughes, L. Bonita Patterson, James Bradford Terrell, and Reuven Bar-On

Description: This work centers on teaching coaches how to increase their client's emotional and social intelligence. Research shows that emotional intelligence, measured by one's emotional quotient (EQ), is an important predictor of success. This book is filled with 'workouts' and forty-six practical exercises for helping clients develop this skill. One of this work's strengths is that it includes convincing research on the value of developing emotional intelligence, as well as many empirically-supported metrics and activities. However, this book only covers one facet of the many tools a coach would use to meet his or her client's needs.

Paperback: 416 pages

Publisher: Pfeiffer; Pap/Cdr edition (August 24, 2005)

ISBN-10: 0787978434

ISBN-13: 978-0787978433

*Appreciative Coaching: A Positive Process for Change (Jossey-Bass Business & Management)*

by Sara L. Orem, Jacqueline Binkert, and Ann L. Clancy

Description: Based on the successful Appreciative Inquiry approach, this book teaches coaches to rekindle and nourish their client's inner creative resources. The approach uses four steps (discovery, dream, design and destiny), stories, steps and exercises to facilitate this

spirit of inquiry. Although this approach has its strengths, it is not appropriate for all situations. The *Positive Psychology Toolkit* includes the appreciative inquiry approach within a broader framework of the coaching process and positive psychology research.

Hardcover: 272 pages

Publisher: Jossey-Bass (February 9, 2007)

ISBN-10: 0787984531

ISBN-13: 978-0787984533

*Evidence Based Coaching Handbook: Putting Best Practices to Work for Your Clients*

by Dianne R. Stober and Anthony M. Grant (Editors)

Description: This work presents twelve uniquely different approaches to coaching using models from a variety of psychological, cultural and learning perspectives including single-theory approaches such as humanistic, cognitive, and behavioral theory, as well as integrative and cross-theory approaches. The scientific rigor behind this work is an important strength. Each chapter is authored by an expert in the approach, or is written by the coaching model's creator, and each theory is backed by solid empirical research. The extensive bibliography and references provide coaches with many additional resources on evidence-based coaching models and approaches. This work is designed to help coaches define and refine the model they use to structure their coaching. It takes a theoretical approach and, unlike the *Positive Psychology Toolkit*, there is little emphasis on practical tools, interventions and assessments that coaches can use. The *Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches* takes a more application-oriented approach, providing research-based tools that the coaches can incorporate into their existing coaching models and frameworks.

Hardcover: 416 pages

Publisher: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. (April 21, 2006)

ISBN-10: 0471720860

ISBN-13: 978-0471720867

*Co-Active Coaching, 2nd Edition: New Skills for Coaching People Toward Success in Work and Life*

by Laura Whitworth, Karen Kimsey-House, Henry Kimsey-House, and Phillip Sandahl

Description: This work teaches the co-active coaching process, emphasizing the relationship between client and coach, and teaching the coach how to use interactive participation and collaboration to help clients establish and achieve their agendas. The work is divided into teaching coaching fundamentals, skills and processes. The toolkit includes intake sheets, forms, activities, powerful questions and other valuable resources. This work does not use any measurement tools for assessing clients, whereas the *Positive Psychology Toolkit* uses well-validated assessment tools. Both *Co-Active Coaching* and the *Positive Psychology Toolkit* use case studies to make techniques and the coaching process come alive. However, there is no reference to scientific support for these coaching practices, so this book alone will not help coaches meet the demand for evidence-based techniques which are becoming more necessary for gaining a competitive edge in this field. (Diener and Dean, 2007).

Paperback: 336 pages

Publisher: Davies-Black Publishing; 2 Pap/Com edition (February 25, 2007)

ISBN-10: 0891061983

ISBN-13: 978-0891061984



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## Annotated Table of Contents

### Positive Psychology Toolkit for Coaches

- I. Positive Psychology and Coaching
  - a. The Value of a Positive Approach
  - b. How and Why Coaches Use Positive Psychology Tools
  - c. How to Use This Toolkit
- II. Initial Assessment
  - a. Start Where You Are
    - i. Overview of positive psychology tools for assessing the client's current state, strengths and resources
  - b. Key Coaching Questions
    - i. What are your strengths and resources?
    - ii. What makes you happy?
    - iii. How satisfying is your life?
  - c. Positive Psychology Assessments

Includes descriptions and how to use the assessments with clients

    - i. VIA Strengths Questionnaire (Values In Action Institute, 2003)
    - ii. Clifton StrengthsFinder assessment (The Gallup Organization., 2000)
    - iii. Personal Scorecard (Giffen, 2007)
    - iv. Additional assessments from Authentic Happiness website:  
<http://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu/>
      1. Fordyce Emotions Questionnaire (Fordyce, 2002)
      2. General Happiness Questionnaire (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999)
      3. PANAS Questionnaire (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988)
      4. Approaches to Happiness Questionnaire (Peterson, 2003)
      5. Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener, 2002)
- III. Setting Goals
  - a. Choose What You Want
    - i. Overview of how to clarify the client's goals and objectives and define success
  - b. Key Coaching Questions
    - i. What are your goals and objectives?
    - ii. What do you value?
    - iii. What are your commitments and priorities?
    - iv. What do you need in life to be at your best?
  - c. Positive Psychology Tools

Includes descriptions and how to use the tools with clients

    - i. Designing an Authentically Happy Life (Seligman, 2002)
    - ii. Designing a Values-Based Life (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002)
    - iii. Goal Setting (Locke, 1991 & 1996; Locke & Latham 1990a, 1990b, 2002, 2006)
    - iv. Best Possible Future Self (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006); King, 1998)

- v. Hope Theory (Snyder, Rand & Sigman, 1991)
- vi. Intentional Change Theory (Boyatzis, 2006)

#### IV. Accepting Reality

- a. Accepting What Is
  - i. Overview of how to reduce the energy drains that come from fighting the current situation
- b. Key Coaching Questions
  - i. What are your goals and objectives?
  - ii. What do you value?
  - iii. What are your commitments and priorities?
  - iv. What do you need in life to be at your best?
- c. Positive Psychology Assessments
  - i. Transgressions Motivation Questionnaire (McCullough, 2002)
  - ii. Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI) (Walach, Buchheld, Buttenmüller, Kleinknecht & Schmidt, 2006)
- d. Positive Psychology Tools
  - i. Meditation (Shapiro, Schwartz & Santerre, 2005)
  - ii. Forgiveness (McCullough & Witvliet, 2005; Fincham & Kashdan, 2004)
  - iii. Journaling (Burton & King, 2004; Bonck & Gray, 2005; Niederhoffer & Pennebaker, 2005)
  - iv. Mindfulness (Walach, Buchheld, Buttenmüller, Kleinknecht & Schmidt, 2006)
  - v. Reframing (Eckstein, 1997; Bagwell-Reese & Brack, 1997; Goldberg, 1998)

#### V. Building Positives

- a. Accentuate Your Positives
  - i. Overview of how to enhance and leverage the client's strengths, optimism, hope, gratitude and success patterns
- b. Key Coaching Questions
  - i. What's good about you?
  - ii. What's good about your life?
  - iii. How can you help the good things grow?
- c. Positive Psychology Assessments
  - i. Optimism Test (Seligman, 2002)
  - ii. Adult Dispositional Hope Scale (Snyder, 1991)
  - iii. Gratitude Survey – GQ6 (McCullough, Emmons & Tsang, 2002)
  - iv. Gratitude, Resentment and Appreciation Test – GRAT (Watkins, Woodward, Stone & Kolts, 2003)
  - v. General Self-Efficacy Assessment (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1993)
  - vi. PANAS Questionnaire (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988)
- d. Positive Psychology Tools
  - i. Optimism (Seligman, 1998; Carver & Scheier, 2005; Peterson & Steen, 2005)
  - ii. Gratitude (Emmons & Shelton, 2005)

1. Three Blessings (Peterson & Seligman, 2004)
2. Gratitude Visit (Seligman, 2002)
3. Future Gratitude (Giffen, 2005)
- iii. Hope (Lopez et. al, 2004)
- iv. Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990)
- v. Self-Efficacy & Success (Maddux, 2005)
- vi. Strengths Building (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Buckingham & Clifton, 2001)
- vii. Humor (Lefcourt, 2005)
- viii. Daily Dozen (Giffen, 2005)

## VI. Reducing Negatives

- a. Down-Size Your Negatives
  - i. Overview of how to diminish negative thinking and limiting beliefs, and build persistence and resilience
- b. Key Coaching Questions
  - i. Is pessimism impacting your life?
  - ii. What negative habits would you like to change?
  - iii. Are limiting beliefs holding you back?
  - iv. How resilient are you?
- c. Positive Psychology Assessments
  - i. Optimism Test (Seligman, 2002)
  - ii. PANAS Questionnaire (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988)
  - iii. Grit Survey (Duckworth, 2004)
  - iv. The RQ Test – Resilience (Reivich & Shatté, 2002)
  - v. CES-D Questionnaire (Radloff, 1977)
- d. Positive Psychology Tools
  - i. Grit (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews & Kelly, 2006),
  - ii. Resilience (Reivich & Shatté, 2002; Masten & Reed, 2005)
  - iii. Overcoming Bad Habits (Prochaska, Norcross & DiClemente, 1994)
  - iv. Benefit Finding (Tennen & Affleck, 2005)
  - v. Satisficing (Schwartz, 2004)
  - vi. Self-Regulation (Brown & Ryan, 2004)
  - vii. Flipping (Giffen, 2002)
  - viii. Physical Exercise (Salmon, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2005; Mutrie & Faulkner, 2004)

## VII. Enhancing Relationships

- a. Enhance Your Relationships
  - i. Overview of how to broaden and build positive connections at home and work
  - ii. Includes a self-assessed scorecard of the client's Strengths, Capabilities, Opportunities, Resources, and Energizers in the realm of relationships
- b. Key Coaching Questions
  - i. How effective and fulfilling are your relationships at home?

- ii. How effective and fulfilling are your relationships at work?
  - iii. How effective and fulfilling are your relationships in your community?
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## **SAMPLE CHAPTER: Gratitude**

Positive Psychology research is providing empirical evidence to confirm what most of us know from our own experience—that good friends, a loving family, meaningful work, good health, and having a sense of purpose are all key contributors to our well-being and satisfaction in life.

Yet despite the pivotal role these things play in our well-being, they'll only make us happy if we notice and appreciate them. This is where the cultivation of gratitude enters the coaching process. If you have clients who would like to be happier, gratitude is a natural place to start.

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Quotation in text box: “Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.” – Cicero

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### **Overview**

Martin Seligman and Chris Peterson, two of the leading researches in the field of positive psychology, include Gratitude as one of the 24 universal character strengths and virtues. These strengths form the building blocks of human happiness and flourishing. Peterson and Seligman define gratitude as “a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty” (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 554).

As we practice gratitude, we focus our attention on the good things and gifts in our lives, and we experience the happiness they bring us—right now, in the present moment. Entering into

the experience of Gratitude leads to immediate feelings of joy, well-being, peace, contentment, and a deeply satisfying sense that life is good. In short, gratitude is a doorway to happiness.

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Quotation in text box: “To speak gratitude is courteous and pleasant, to enact gratitude is generous and noble, but to live gratitude is to touch Heaven.” – Johannes A. Gaertner

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Take a moment now to think of something you feel grateful for—it could be the kindness of a friend, the love of someone special, a place you feel comfortable, or something that energizes and inspires you. What are you grateful for in your life right now? And how does that gratitude make you feel? As you open your heart and truly feel the gratitude, you can’t help but feel happy. Now ask yourself, was this easy or difficult to do? Could you feel happy in the present moment? For some people, feeling happy is as easy and natural as breathing. For others, it can be much more challenging. And while research shows that we each have a predetermined “happiness set-point” (Lykken & Tellegen, 1996), it’s important to recognize that our happiness levels are not set in stone.

The ability to feel happiness is like a muscle. It’s strengthened with practice, and it atrophies from disuse. Additional research has shown that although 50% of our happiness level is controlled by a genetically determined set-point and 10% results from our life circumstances, a full 40% of our ability to feel happy is under our own control (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon, & Schkade, 2005). One of the most effective ways to increase our sense of happiness and well-being is through the practice of gratitude.

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Quotation in text box: “Happiness is itself a kind of gratitude.” – Joseph Wood Krutch

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As we explore gratitude we'll look at it from several perspectives, including the:

- **Definitions and Descriptions**– what it is and how it works as defined and described by leading researchers
- **Research** behind gratitude – what scientists have discovered through empirical research about gratitude and its effects on people
- **Rationale** for including gratitude in coaching engagements – why it works from a positive psychology perspective
- **Live Cases**– two client scenarios showing how gratitude can be used as a coaching tool
- **Resistance** – why clients might resist gratitude in their lives and what to do about it
- **Assessments** for measuring and monitoring changes in gratitude levels in your clients
- **Activities** – a variety of exercises, initiatives and practices a client can use to increase their happiness and well-being by incorporating more gratitude into their lives
- **Resources** – Articles, books, websites and other resources for further information on this topic for coaches and clients
- **References** – The sources used as the knowledge foundation for this work

The following sections contain short summaries of many of the leading resources on gratitude. For a complete review of the research and theories, we recommend the book *The Psychology of Gratitude*, edited by Emmons and McCullough (2004).

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Quotation in text box: “Gratitude is something of which none of us can give too much. For on the smiles, the thanks we give, our little gestures of appreciation, our neighbors build their philosophy of life.” – A. J. Cronin

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## Definitions and Descriptions

### *What Gratitude Is*

We began our overview with Peterson and Seligman's (2004) definition of gratitude as "a sense of thankfulness and joy in response to receiving a gift whether the gift be a tangible benefit from a specific other or a moment of peaceful bliss evoked by natural beauty" (p. 554).

However, devising an empirical definition of gratitude is challenging because it can be viewed as an emotion, an attitude, a moral virtue, a habit, a personality trait or a coping response (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Researchers agree, however, that gratitude is a universal part of the human condition (McCullough and Tsang 2004). A person feels grateful when they believe they are the recipients of some positive outcome due to something or someone else's actions.

McCullough and Tsang (2004) content that "[to] the extent that gratitude causes us to stop and ponder the benevolence of other people, and to the extent to which gratitude actually motivates people to behave prosocially, gratitude may be thought of as a social resource that is well worth understanding—and perhaps even cultivating—for the development of a society based on goodwill."

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Quotation in text box: "In ordinary life we hardly realize that we receive a great deal more than we give, and that it is only with gratitude that life becomes rich." – Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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Leading researchers on gratitude (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons & Larson, 2001) describe three functions of the emotion of gratitude: it is a moral barometer, moral motive and moral reinforcer. "Moral," in these cases, refers to the fact that the person performing the behavior has positive intentions and the recipient's best interest in mind.

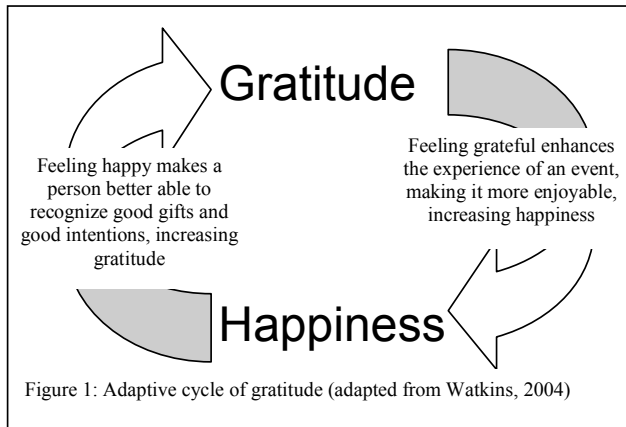
1. As a **moral barometer**, the feeling of gratitude signals that we have received someone else's moral action. In other words, as we acknowledge the good things people have done for us, our perspective on life shifts from living in a "cruel world" to a "friendly world." Although it doesn't always fit into their theory, McCullough and Tang (2004) acknowledge that gratitude is also experienced for non-human actions which are attributed to good fortune, God, karma or the like.
2. As a **moral motive**, gratitude prompts us to reciprocate the tangible and intangible gifts we have received. When we feel grateful for the good things in our life, we want to "give back" or "pay it forward" to others in the world.
3. As a **moral reinforcer**, when we receive thanks for something we have done, it increases our desire to do something else that provides benefit in the future. This creates a self-rewarding cycle that can give gratitude its own momentum once it gets started in a client's life.

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 Quotation in text box: "Gratitude is the sign of noble souls." – Aesop  
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Research shows that people were more likely to produce gratitude when they feel that:

- they had received a valued gift,
  - the intention of the gift was for their benefit and
  - the gift met or exceeded their expectations of social mandates in the situation
- (Watkins, 2004).

Gratitude is produced by feeling happy, which in turn, makes the person feel more grateful. Watkins calls this the “adaptive cycle of gratitude and happiness” (2004). (See Figure 1.)



### *How Gratitude Works*

There are a number of theories about why gratitude makes us feel good. One theory is that viewing a positive experience as a gift enhances its impact (Diener, Colvin, Pavot & Allman, 1991; McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons & Larson, 2001) and positive life experiences are savored (McCullough, 2003). Lewis describes this connection when he says, “It is not out of compliment that lovers keep on telling one another how beautiful they are; the delight is incomplete until it is expressed” (1958, quoted in Watkins, 2004, p.167). He argues that feeling grateful increases our enjoyment and consummates the positive experience.

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Quotation in text box: “Silent gratitude isn't much use to anyone.” – Gladys Berthe Stern

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Another theory contends that gratitude may make us feel good because it counteracts the law of habituation, which is similar to the hedonic treadmill and the satisfaction treadmill (Frijda,

1988; Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Schwartz, 2002). According to these theories, people get used to their current state of happiness and begin to take it for granted. Gratitude reminds people of the blessings in their lives and helps them savor rather than undermine their circumstances. Another theory is that gratitude directs attention away from social comparison, which is linked with depression and increased dissatisfaction with life. McCullough, Emmons and Tsang's (2002) research showed that subjects expressing gratitude were less likely to feel frustration and resentment over other people's achievements and possessions. As Watkins states, "When an individual is grateful for the greenness of his or her own lawn, he or she is not likely to be looking at the greener grass on the other side of the fence" (2004, p.177).

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Quotation in text box: "Both abundance and lack exist simultaneously in our lives, as parallel realities. It is always our conscious choice which secret garden we will tend... when we choose not to focus on what is missing from our lives but are grateful for the abundance that's present—love, health, family, friends, work, the joys of nature and personal pursuits that bring us pleasure—the wasteland of illusion falls away and we experience Heaven on earth." – Sarah Ban Breathnach

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Yet another hypothesis is that gratitude serves as a coping mechanism for adversities. McAdams and Bauer (2004) suggest that gratitude helps people reframe their memories, turning bad things into good and enabling negative events to have less impact on their lives. When people remember an event and express gratitude for it, they are changing how that memory is coded in their brain. Next time, when the person goes to retrieve that memory, they remember the gratitude they felt. People who are depressed are more likely to recall negative memories

than positive memories, whereas grateful individuals are better able to recall positive experiences in their lives.

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Quotation in text box: “I thank God for my handicaps for, through them, I have found myself, my work, and my God.” – Helen Keller

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Relationships are a major contributor to subjective well-being. Expressing gratitude may also increase well-being through social benefits by increasing the quality of relationships in a person’s life, and enriching their value (Watkins, 2004). Expressing gratitude makes people less focused on themselves and more focused on others, which helps prevent the negative consequences of “maladaptive self-preoccupation” (Watkins, 2004, p.183). Grateful people are more empathetic and tend to take other people’s perspective into account. Others rate them as more helpful and generous. Expressing gratitude helps relationships flourish.

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Quotation in text box: “The deepest principle of human nature is the craving to be appreciated.” – William James

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Gratitude can also affect our relationship with the “things” in our life. According to Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade (2005), gratitude may counteract hedonic adaptation by helping people appreciate and savor what they already have as well as reduce feelings of anger, envy or greed that are linked to unhealthy materialism. Recent research showed that measures of gratitude correlated negatively with self-report measures of materialism (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002; Polack, 2006). That is, those who scored high on gratitude tended to score low

on materialism. Particularly, grateful people were less likely to agree with statements about material possessions leading to happiness.

Polack states, “the hedonic profiles of materialistic people and grateful people are mirror opposites” (2006, p. 355). One explanation for this is that gratitude makes people more trusting of others. If people believe that the positive things in their lives are due to the intentional and benevolent behaviors of others, they feel more secure, safe and fulfilled, which correlates negatively with materialism (Polack, 2006). Also, grateful people spend less time on materialistic pursuits and more time cultivating relationships, which is strongly correlated with higher levels of happiness and well-being (Diener & Seligman, 2002).

Another strong correlate with gratitude is spirituality. A study by McCullough, Emmons and Tang (2002) showed that people who scored high on gratitude scored high on spirituality and religiosity. One plausible explanation for this is that many of the world’s religions preach gratitude as important virtue.

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Quotation in text box: “A noble person is a mindful and thankful of the favors he receives from others.... You have no cause for anything but gratitude and joy.” – The Buddha

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Since correlation does not determine causation, having strong spiritual beliefs may make people more inclined to experience gratitude or vice versa. Second, when expressing gratitude for things that are beyond human control, spiritual people tend to attribute the gratitude to non-human agents such as God, nature, the Universe, etc. Interestingly, in McCullough, Emmons and Tang’s (2002) study, people who were grateful not only scored high on traditional measures of

religiousness, they were also more inclined to have a sense of contact with higher power and to believe that all things are interconnected.

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Quotation in text box: “Can you see the holiness in those things you take for granted--a paved road or a washing machine? If you concentrate on finding what is good in every situation, you will discover that your life will suddenly be filled with gratitude, a feeling that nurtures the soul.”  
– Rabbi Harold Kushner

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All of these theories support the hypothesis that gratitude may contribute to well-being by decreasing people’s vulnerability to depression, the common cold of today’s psychopathologies (Seligman, 2005). In summary, gratitude is linked with increased well-being, prosociality, and spirituality, and decreased materialism.

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Quotation in text box: “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.” – Meister Eckhart

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## Research

Gratitude research has looked at gratitude from two perspectives: how it enhances well-being and how it functions in coping with adversities. The following is a brief overview of the empirical literature.

Emmons and McCullough refer to gratitude interventions as “easily implemented [strategies] for improving one’s level of well-being” (2003, p. 386). When studying well-being, researchers typically ask psychological, physical, social and global health questions. In their

studies, Emmons and McCullough's rated mood using affective terms such as "interested, distressed, excited, alert, irritable, sad, stressed, ashamed, happy, grateful, tired, upset, strong, nervous, guilty, joyful, determined, thankful, calm, attentive, forgiving, hostile, energetic, hopeful, enthusiastic, active, afraid, proud, appreciative, angry, thankful and appreciative" (2003, p. 379). Physical symptoms were assessed by asking if people experienced "headaches, faintness/dizziness, stomachache/pain, shortness of breath, chest pain, acne/skin irritation, runny/congested nose, stiff or sore muscles, stomach upset/nausea, irritable bowels, hot or cold spells, poor appetite, coughing/sore throat, or other" (2003, pp. 379-380) and amount of time spent sleeping and exercising. Social measures included people's receptivity to aid and desire to help others. Global appraisals asked questions such as how they felt about the past week and what their expectations were for the upcoming weeks. In their research, Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson. (2005) used depression and happiness scales to measure the effect of gratitude on well-being, particularly the Center for Epidemiological Studies-Depression Scale (CES-D) and the Steen Happiness Index (SHI).

#### *Summary of Empirical Research*

<b>Author(s)</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Procedure</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky & Sheldon (in press)	355 undergraduates	-2 experimental groups (expressing optimism and expressing gratitude) and control group Once a week for 8 weeks -Baseline established before activity and effects measured up to 9 months after activity -Participants were divided into those who were motivated to make positive changes in their lives and those who weren't	-The participants who had significantly increased their well-being and decreased depressive symptoms the most were the ones who were motivated to make positive changes in their life and put in effort. -Immediately after the intervention there was no statistically significant difference between the groups. -However at 6 month follow-up those in the activities group showed increased well-being only -At 9 month follow-up there was again no difference between groups.
Emmons &	192	-2 experimental groups	-Relative to controls, those in the



McCullough (2003)- Study 1	undergraduates	(expressing gratitude or describing hassles) and a control group -10 weeks, 1 report of well-being outcomes per week	gratitude group felt better about their lives, were more optimistic about future events, had fewer physical complaints ( $p<.05$ ) and spent more time exercising ( $p<.01$ ).
Emmons & McCullough (2003)- Study 2	157 undergraduates	-3 experimental groups (expressing gratitude, describing hassles or induced downward social comparison) -2 weeks, daily diary entries and reports of well-being outcomes	-Those in the gratitude group reported higher positive affect and demonstrated more prosocial behavior. -There was no statistically significant difference in physical symptoms.
Emmons & McCullough (2003)- Study 3	57 adults with congenital or adult onset Neuromuscular Disease	-1 experimental group (expressing gratitude) and a control group -3 weeks, daily diary entries and reports of well-being outcomes -Spouses and significant others of the participants were surveyed for observed changes in well-being.	-Compared to controls, those in the gratitude group experienced more positive affect and less negative affect, were more optimistic about future events, felt more connected to other people and reported better quality and more hours of sleep. -These observations were confirmed by spouses and significant others. -There were no statistically significant changes in physical well-being.
Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade (2005)	Students, quantity n/a	-6 weeks of contemplating one's blessings -2 experimental groups (counting blessings once a week or three times a week)	-Compared to control, short term increases in happiness were observed -Optimal timing is key. Those counting blessings once a week did better than those who did it three times a week.
Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson (2005)- Study 1	150 adults	-Internet based study. 1 experimental group (performing a gratitude visit) and a placebo control group -Baseline established before intervention and effects measured up to 6 months after intervention	-Immediately after intervention, those in the gratitude visit group were significantly happier and less depressed than controls. -However, three and six months after follow-up, there was no difference between the two groups, and the depression and happiness rates were similar to that of baseline.
Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson (2005)- Study 2	129 adults	-Internet based study. One experimental group (writing down three good things that happened daily for a week and why) and a	-At one-month follow-up, those in the gratitude group were happier and less depressed. -These effects endured at three and six months follow-up.

		placebo control group -Baseline established before intervention and effects measured up to 6 months after intervention	-Those who continued the intervention on their own experienced additional benefit.
Sheldon & Lyubomirsky (2006)	57 students	-Four week longitudinal study -Three groups: expressing gratitude, visualizing best possible self and a control.	-All the groups (including controls) had immediate decreased negative affect. -The best possible self group was the only one to increase immediate positive affect. Gratitude also boosted positive affect but not as much as the visualization group. -The best possible self exercise got the most motivation ratings, people were most interested in continuing it. -Those who continued the exercise on their own experienced the most happiness. -There was no long term effect at follow-up

The results of the following studies are listed on Emmons and McCulloughs' website:

<http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/emmons/>.

Emmons	n/a	n/a	-Participants keeping gratitude lists were more likely to make progress towards their goals
Emmons	n/a	n/a	-Participants in the gratitude condition were more likely to have helped someone with a personal problem or offer emotional support

#### *Empirical Research on Gratitude and Well-Being*

Gratitude is linked to well-being in that grateful people report having, “higher levels of positive emotions, life satisfaction, vitality, optimism and lower levels depression and stress”

(<http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/emmons/>). Emmons and McCullough's (2003) studies showed that the gratitude interventions were associated with increased emotional, social and sometimes physical well being, and that the interventions appeared stronger when practiced daily

as opposed to weekly. A subtle yet important finding from their research showed that gratitude was a mediator in the effects of the intervention on positive affect. That is, a coach cannot hand a client a list of things to be grateful for, tell them to read it, and expect them to reap the benefits. The client needs to feel the gratitude. Therefore, it is important for your clients to develop their own lists and to focus on things for which they are truly grateful.

Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson's (2005) research showed that Gratitude Visits—visiting someone to express gratitude—had only short-term effects on boosting happiness and decreasing depression. Yet personal accounts by some Gratitude Visit participants (Carey, 2004; Seligman, 2002), as well as co-author Deb Giffen's personal experience, have indicated that these short-term effects can be profound.

Emmons and McCullough's (2003) research indicated that appreciation and gratitude are synonymous, so this tool includes research on studies relating to appreciation. For example, Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson's intervention of three good things did not directly tell the participants to express gratitude. However, participants were presumably experiencing appreciation when searching for benefits in their day. The positive effects of this intervention endured at six months follow-up. Additionally, the people who experienced the most benefit were those who, with no prompting from the experimenters, voluntarily continued the intervention.

In the largest and longest-term study held to date, Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky and Sheldon's (in press) demonstrated that expressing gratitude increases happiness, well being and satisfaction with one's experiences. Their ongoing research aims to define the optimal conditions for practicing happiness-enhancing interventions.

*Empirical Research on Gratitude and Coping with Adversities*

In addition to enhancing well-being, gratitude can also help people cope with adversity. A study by Ventura and Boss (1983) of 200 parents looked at the types of coping mechanisms parents use to handle the challenges of having a newborn. Parents said that finding things to be thankful for was a useful coping mechanism for dealing with the stresses of parenthood. This was particularly expressed by mothers more than fathers. Similarly, Affleck and Tennen (1996) reviewed studies of using “benefit-finding” (a technique similar to, however qualitatively different from gratitude) to cope with trauma and adversities. Many of the studies came from medical literature of adversities such as heart attacks, strokes, breast cancer, and infertility problems, as well as the adversities faced by the caregivers of ill patients. The advantages of the benefit-finding technique included strengthening of social relationships; less negative affect, depression and mood disturbances; greater meaning in life; positive personality change; and changes in personal goals and priorities.

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Quotation in text box: “There are no mistakes, no coincidences. All events are blessings given to us to learn from.” – Elisabeth Kubler-Ross

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### *Learning from the research*

The more we understand the empirical research on gratitude, the more easily we can tailor the gratitude exercises to meet our client’s needs. For example, McCullough, Emmons and Tsang’s (2002) research showed that grateful people tended to attribute the causes of events in their life to external sources. However, research on self-efficacy, another key contributor to well-being, showed that people are happier when they have a sense of personal responsibility for the good events in their lives (Maddux, 2005). If your clients tend to place too much emphasis on

other people or external events as the cause of their positive experiences, it might be helpful to ask questions that explore how they themselves contributed to the gratitude they are experiencing. Is he a kind person who attracts kind actions from others? Did he contribute in some way to this person or group before? Was she giving or supportive in other areas of her life? Was she open to the possibility of experiencing gratitude?

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Quotation in text box: “Thanksgiving opens the doors. It changes a child's personality...

Thankful children want to give, they radiate happiness, they draw people.” – Sir John Templeton

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Sometimes, the benefits of gratitude activities demonstrate the sleeper effect, that is, it takes a couple of weeks or months to see the benefit. The activity appears to be most successful when the client is motivated, committed and invested in the exercise (Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky, & Sheldon, in press). The quality of the “fit” between the activity and the client is also important. Clients will experience the most benefit if they value the activity, if they believe they will benefit from it, and if the decision to do the activity was self-determined. Lastly, and not surprisingly, those who put more effort into the activity experienced the most benefit; particularly those who continued the activity after the experiment was over.

On a cautionary note, studies, also showed that gratitude can be over-practiced (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005). Although it is unclear whether there is an optimal length for gratitude interventions, Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky, and Sheldon’s (in press) study showed that although benefits continued to build for up to three months of continuous gratitude practice, these results faded by the sixth month. Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade (2005) found that contemplating things to be grateful for was more effective once a week than three

times a week. These results suggest that although expressing gratitude helps us avoid hedonic adaptation to the good things in our lives, if we repeatedly express our gratitude in the same way we can habituate to the gratitude process itself. If we become bored with our gratitude practice, it loses its positive emotional charge and ceases to provide its benefits. One solution for this challenge may be to vary the types of gratitude exercises and have the client choose or create exercises that are relevant to their current situation.

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Quotation in text box: “The best way to pay for a lovely moment is to enjoy it.” – Richard Bach

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*Physiology of Gratitude: The grateful heart and mind*

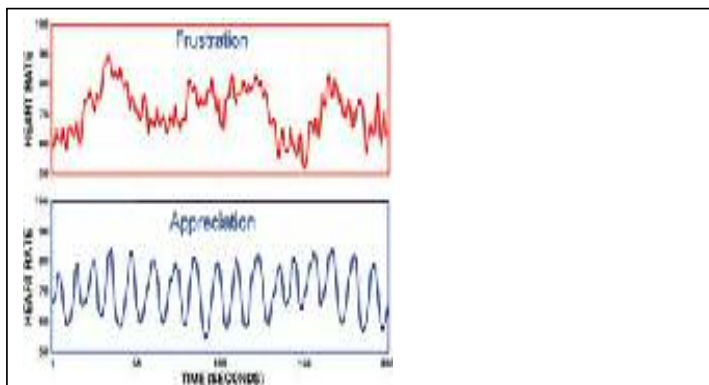
As the scientific focus on positive emotions increases, so do questions about the relationship of these emotions to the human body. The cognitive-behavioral theory states that our thoughts and beliefs about the event govern our physical and emotional reaction to events. That is, between the occurrence of an event and our reaction to it, there is an important step: our interpretation of what that event means. This model suggests that our emotions come from our thoughts. The wide spread success of cognitive behavioral therapy provides us with a wide range of interventions geared towards encouraging positive thinking.

However, the process also flows in the other direction. That is, our thoughts come from our emotions; the body reacts first and the thoughts come second. Emotions are sometimes faster than thoughts, and in these situations, activities that target positive thinking are not enough. Rollin McCarty and Doc Childre (2004) work with the physiology of the heart to create activities that change people’s emotional states which in turn changes their thoughts.

McCarty and Childre are two leading researchers in a technique they call HeartMath.

Through complex processes, their team has plotted the heart's rhythm and its relationship to other physiological processes. They found that experiencing negative emotions such as anger created erratic heart rhythms, whereas experiencing positive emotions such as gratitude created coherent ones. The greater the heart rhythm coherence the greater the physiological benefit. Figure 2 illustrates the heart rate curves produced from appreciation compared to that of frustration (Institute of HeartMath Research Center, 1999). Appreciation shifted the heart rate and created a steady curve.

In one study, a 15-minute appreciation intervention significantly boosted the participant's immune system (McCarty, Atkinson, Tiller, Rein & Watkins, 1996). Other studies of activities that increase positive affect correlated with decreased blood pressure, stress hormones, and depression, and increased positive mood, vitality and general well-being. These physical and psychological benefits were reported with both clinical and non-clinical populations (McCarty & Childre, 2004).



**Figure 2:** Changing Heart Rhythms – Positive emotions produce coherent and smooth rhythms. This enhances communication between the heart and the brain.  
Source: Google Images

*General Recommendations on Increasing Happiness*

Broader research on how to increase happiness levels in general (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005) revealed some guidelines that are also highly applicable to using gratitude activities with coaching clients:

- Engage in a variety of new activities that relate to your values and interests.
- Make a habit of initiating the activities, but be creative in changing the timing, focus, and type of activities so they don't become boring.
- Avoid basing your happiness on acquiring certain objects or circumstances (e.g. buying a new car, moving to Hawaii or getting a raise) because you will tend to habituate to such stable factors.
- You can deter, or at least delay, habituation to the good things in life by actively appreciating them or engaging with them in other positive ways (e.g. consciously enjoy driving the car, savor the Hawaiian environment, or set aside a certain percentage of your raise to spend on something special once each month).
- Stay active. In order to create sustainable changes in your level of happiness, you need to consciously and intentionally change your activities, and keep them aligned with your values and interests.

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Quotation in text box: “[The most fortunate are those who] have a wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy.” – Abraham Maslow

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## Rationale

Positive psychology researchers have tested a wide variety of factors to determine which ones have a significant effect on our well-being. According to research and literature reviews by Peterson and Seligman (2006), gratitude had one of the strongest correlations with happiness and life satisfaction (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3:** Factors Impacting Happiness and Life Satisfaction

Little or No Impact	Moderate Impact	Major Impact
Age	Number of Friends	Gratitude
Gender	Marriage	Optimism
Education	Spirituality	Employment
Social Class	Amount of Leisure Time	Frequency of Sex
Income	Physical Health	Self Esteem
Having Children	Being Conscientious	
Race or Ethnicity	Extraversion	
Intelligence		
Physical		
Attractiveness		

Adapted from Peterson (2006)

But gratitude doesn't stand on its own. We need something for which to be grateful. According to the research, being grateful for our optimistic mindset, our jobs, our sexual relationships and our self-esteem might be possible starting points since they have the strongest correlation with happiness and life satisfaction. But often, when you ask people what they are most grateful for they'll reply with something from the Moderate category. Having many friends may only have a moderate correlation with our happiness, but being grateful for our friends increases the odds that we'll be happy. Being married is good, but not as significant as being grateful for our spouse. And being healthy isn't as likely to contribute to our happiness as being grateful for our health. It is the heart-felt emotion of gratitude—expressed towards the good things in life—that has the greatest impact on our happiness.

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Quotation in text box: “I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.” – Gilbert Keith Chesterton

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Life’s hectic pace, however, often leaves our clients with little time to pay attention to and appreciate the things that make them genuinely happy. This is compounded by the fact many of the sources of true happiness can be ubiquitous. They are so constantly present in our lives that they fade out of our conscious awareness. Over time, this can lead to lower and lower levels of happiness even though life is good. Seligman notes that although income and standard of living “have risen dramatically in prosperous nations over the last half century...the level of life satisfaction has been entirely flat” (2002, p. 49). In fact, clinical depression is increasing worldwide and by 2020 the World Health Organization expects depression to rise from fourth to second place as a leading cause of disability for all ages and both sexes (World Health Organization, 2007). In short, we have more reasons to be happy than ever, but far less happiness.

Here’s one reason why we’re in this dilemma. At any moment in time, we have a huge array of thoughts, feelings and experiences available to us in our environment, but our minds can only pay conscious attention to a few items at a time. To deal with this challenge, our genetic code has programmed us to screen out anything that remains constant and only notice items that are unusual or threatening. This leaves us blind to the “ongoing goodness,” and hyper-aware of anything that could cause us any suffering or pain. We only notice the good things when they become exceptionally good (unusual), or when they disappear (which feels threatening).

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Quotation in text box: “Don’t it always seem to go, that you don’t know what you’ve got ‘til it’s gone. They’ve paved Paradise, and put up a parking lot.” – Joni Mitchell

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For example, our brain is constantly receiving signals about our breathing and the sensations in our right foot. As long as these things remain constantly “good,” we’re totally unaware of them. But if there are any major changes or threats, the brain routes the signals to our conscious awareness. An asthma attack or blisters from a new shoe will raise signals of distress. A breath of fresh air as you open the window or stepping barefoot onto the cool grass on a hot summer day will register as a new unusual positive event—and you’ll feel a burst of happiness, for a moment. Soon, however, you’ll habituate to the sensations and they will fade out of your conscious awareness.

Likewise, a stable job, a solid marriage and long-term friendships are all sending us signals, but we’re not aware of them unless something changes dramatically or goes wrong. Gratitude reminds us to appreciate the good things that are already present in our lives—while they are still here to appreciate. Healthy breathing and comfortable feet can be sources of happiness if we allow them into our awareness. The same is true of healthy friendships, mature love, a stable income and a roof over our heads.

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Quotation in text box: “Take full account of the excellencies which you possess, and in gratitude remember how you would hanker after them, if you had them not.” – Marcus Aurelius Antonius

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Luckily, people like to feel happy. So for most clients, adding more gratitude to their lives will be a welcome activity. In fact, the human drive to feel happy is so strong that when

people don't take time to appreciate and enjoy what makes them happy in their lives right now, they can become constantly driven to search for the *next great thing* to rekindle their happiness. That's where some clients can get derailed—especially those who are high achievers.

Earning the *right to feel happy* is one of the ways that high-achievers motivate themselves. As you listen to your high-achieving clients talk, you're likely to hear one of their common refrains: "I'll be happy when...." They fill in the blank with whatever they want to achieve at the moment: "I'll be happy when I win the next promotion...find the perfect love...achieve my ideal fitness level...or have \$X million in my bank account. Of course, there's nothing wrong with having goals—positive psychology research confirmed that they're an essential part of a meaningful and happy life (Locke, 2005). And it's also fine for clients to use "earning a right to be happy" as a motivating force in achieving their goals. But problems arise when they make goal achievement the *only* criteria for their happiness, and stop allowing themselves to feel happy in the moment because they haven't achieved their goals yet. The ability to feel happy is a skill we're all born with. But like all skills, we can lose the ability if we continually deny ourselves the opportunity to practice. Happiness only happens *in the current moment*, and if we lose the ability to feel happy *now*, then life starts to lose its zing. That's the situation that brought Brian to coaching.

### **Coach's Case Study: Gratitude and Well-Being<sup>1</sup>**

"People would say I've got it made," said Brian. "Impressive job, beautiful wife, great kids, plenty of money. I've achieved everything I ever wanted...so why do I feel so restless? Something's missing. I guess that's what I want to get out of coaching. I want to find a way to

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<sup>1</sup> Details that might reveal the client's identity have been changed and occasionally data from two or more clients has been combined to maintain client confidentiality in this case study.

be happy again.” Brian paused, lost in thought. I nodded, noticing the barely audible sigh that revealed the frustration and confusion behind Brian’s words. As an executive coach, I’ve heard similar themes in my first conversations with clients before. I asked Brian a few more questions about his background and the familiar story of a high achiever emerged. Born and raised in the mid-west, Brian graduated with honors from his state university. He was recruited by a global manufacturing firm where his natural leadership ability and his knack for getting things done on time and on budget helped him quickly rise through the leadership ranks. Now, he was on the top team of one of the company’s largest divisions. Along the way, he married his college sweetheart and started a family, making his vision of “the good life” complete.

For years, Brian had thrived on the rapid pace and growing responsibilities of his jobs, juggling travel schedules to attend soccer games, school concerts and monthly get-aways with his wife. Success was the North Star that guided him, and the thrill of each new success kept him going through the long hours and heavy demands of his work. But now he was tired, and the promise of future success felt empty. His North Star had lost its luster. Success didn’t give him energy or happiness anymore.

Rekindling Brian’s happiness became our primary focus. Over the course of a 12-month coaching assignment, I introduced Brian to a variety of positive psychology tools as we explored the seven phases of our coaching engagement: (1) assessing Brian’s current state, (2) recalibrating his goals so they were meaningful and fulfilling again, (3) accepting the “realities” of his life, (4) building on his strengths, (5) releasing his limiting beliefs, (6) enhancing his relationships at work and at home, and (7) defining the contributions he wanted to make in life. In this section, we’ll focus on how gratitude helped Brian rekindle his ability to feel happy.

I recognized that Brian was using “success” as a condition for his happiness. “I’ll be happy when I get the next promotion”, he promised himself. And when he got the promotion he *was* happy—for a little while. But soon the joy of the achievement was overshadowed by the heavy load of responsibilities that came with the new position. He was also caught on what researchers call the Hedonic Treadmill—our tendency to habituate to the “good things” in our lives, so we need higher and higher doses of them to make us feel happy as time goes on. Brian’s second promotion didn’t make him as happy as his first, and by the eighth promotion Brian had come to view the success as something “expected,” rather than as a cause for celebration. As Brian’s gratitude for his success faded, so did his happiness.

Brian had originally set his sights on “success” because it made him happy. But over time, he confused the means (success) with the goal (happiness). My coaching objective was to lead Brian down an experiential path to help him discover for himself that it wasn’t success that made him happy—it was his gratitude for his success that sparked his happiness.

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Quotation in text box: “In our daily lives, we must see that it is not happiness that makes us grateful, but the gratefulness that makes us happy.” – Albert Clarke

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I began by having Brian take the Gratitude Survey (see Assessment section for a link to this free resource from the Authentic Happiness Testing Center). Brian’s score of 34 out of a possible 42 put him below the 25<sup>th</sup> percentile, which gave him clear evidence that there was room for improvement.

Next, I asked Brian to complete two gratitude activities that are empirically proven to increase happiness and well-being: the Three Good Things Exercise and a Gratitude Visit. (See

the Activities section for full descriptions of these exercises.) I also gave Brian a list of possible volunteer activities and asked if he would be willing to commit some time to helping people who were less fortunate than himself.

### *Three Good Things*

Brian began by simply listing three good things that had happened during the day before he went to bed each night. It was important to start his gratitude work with a short, *nano-technique* like this because his schedule was already overbooked and free time was extremely limited. At first he thought the exercise was “silly” and a “waste of time.” He was willing to discuss his resistance with me, however, and our conversation led Brian to an interesting discovery about the source of his resistance. He believed that if he felt grateful for things as they were right now, that he’d lose his motivation—his fuel for success. As surprising as it seemed to Brian, his subconscious mind had somehow equated happiness with stagnation and failure. For him, happiness was the antithesis of success. Once he was aware of that self-limiting belief, Brian was ready and willing to change it. He approached the Three Good Things exercise with new enthusiasm. In addition to listing the three good things each night, he made it a point to feel truly grateful for them for a few moments. After a while, he started noticing the good things as they happened during the day, and savored them as they were happening. He discovered that—contrary to his original belief—the more he was grateful for the good things, the more motivated and energized he became. Before long, his inherent strength of creativity kicked in and he came up with new ways to experience and express his gratitude. At home he started a family practice of sharing Three Good Things over dinner, and at work he opened some of his team meetings by expressing his thanks for the contributions of the individuals on his team. When time permitted,

he also sent one or two thank you notes each week, expressing appreciation to his family, clients, colleagues, or support staff.

### *The Gratitude Visit*

After Brian had become comfortable expressing gratitude, I asked him to think of someone from his past to whom he felt grateful—someone that he had not fully thanked for their kindness or help. Brian selected Pete Jennings, his first mentor at the company. Pete had taken Brian under his wing, introduced him to key people on the senior team, recommended him for prime job assignments, and helped him navigate the politics as he quickly rose through the leadership ranks. Pete had retired several years earlier because of health issues, and Brian hadn't seen Pete since his retirement party. Brian wrote his Gratitude Letter to Pete that night, and set up a time to visit Pete at his home the following week. As he walked into the Jennings's living room, Brian struggled to hide the shock he felt when he saw Pete's face. It was ravaged and careworn beyond his years from his fight with cancer, but the pain didn't stop Pete from eagerly welcoming Brian and questioning him about his career. Pete's eyes took on an old familiar twinkle as he listened to the update on Brian's progress, and he raised a quizzical eyebrow when Brian told him the actual purpose of his visit. Brian's gratitude letter took just a couple of minutes to read, but it launched them into a 90-minute journey of laughter and occasional tears as they relived their times together. The glowing smile on Pete's face when they finally said goodbye left Brian with no doubt about the transformative power of Gratitude. As he told me during our next meeting, "Pete looked five years younger, and I felt ten times happier! I'm so glad I had a chance to tell Pete how much I appreciate him. I'll never forget that visit."

Shortly after reading his gratitude letter to Pete, Brian took the Gratitude Survey again. His new score of 39 out of 42 (up from his previous score of 34) gave objective proof that he had



made significant progress. More importantly, Brian's subjective assessment of his happiness had also increased. He said he felt happier about his life and more optimistic about his future. He had also found creative ways to share his happiness with others, which was enriching his relationships at home and at work. I encouraged Brian to use his creativity to keep changing and adapting his gratitude activities over time, so they would stay fresh and effective for him. There was no resistance from Brian this time because his gratitude had become self-reinforcing. The positive changes in his relationships with family, colleagues and friends had convinced him of how important and gratifying it was to be grateful, and to express his gratitude.

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Quotation in text box: "Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it." – William Arthur Ward

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This could have been the end of our work with gratitude, but there was one more approach that Brian and I decided to pursue.

### *Volunteering*

The latest research studies show that the Three Good Things exercise is more effective when people continue it beyond the experimental period. Although Brian was regularly using Three Good Things to express his gratitude now, I wanted to create enough momentum that he would keep using it after the end of our coaching engagement. Over the years in my coaching practice, I've discovered that gratitude involves a cycle of giving *and* receiving; and I knew that that if Brian wasn't receiving gratitude from others it might be more difficult for him to maintain the momentum of expressing it himself. As an additional gratitude tool, I asked Brian if he'd be willing to experiment with donating two hours of time each month to a local social service

agency. Brian agreed and chose a group that delivers meals to homebound community members who are elderly, ill or disabled. The experience opened Brian's eyes to blessings in his own life that he had been taking for granted—good health, excellent vision and hearing, a pain-free body, and the ability to be actively engaged in life. Although Brian's schedule made it impossible for him to volunteer on a regular basis, his meal deliveries brought him several opportunities to experience the gratitude of others, and gave him a deeper understanding of how good it feels for others to be on the receiving end when he takes the time to appreciate them.

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 Quotation in text box: "The best kind of giving is thanksgiving." – Chesterton  
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### *Conclusions*

Despite gratitude's many benefits, high-achievers like Brian often hold back on feelings of gratitude until they've reached some subjective milestone that they believe *earns* them the right to feel happy. This puts them on the hedonic treadmill, which compounds the problem because their goals tend to get larger each time, making happiness more difficult to achieve and sustain. Without the ability to be happy *now* for what they already have, their chances for experiencing happiness in the future become "few and far between." Their self-imposed conditions for happiness are so high that they rarely experience it, and this lack of practice takes its toll. When they finally reach their goals they can't feel happy. Their achievements seem empty and hollow. Since the new success doesn't bring happiness, they'll compulsively run towards the next goal in a never-ending cycle that always keeps happiness just out of their reach. Getting a great promotion brings a momentary burst of happiness, but without gratitude high-achievers quickly need another "fix" of achievement—and the need often comes long before it's feasible to get the next promotion or new job. Likewise, marrying the person of our dreams may

put us on top of the world for a while, but if we don't establish a practice of feeling of grateful for their love, we're likely to end up longing for someone new. It's easy to see how the lack of gratitude can wreak havoc in our lives. Gratitude helps us avoid this destructive cycle by directing our attention to the fact that life is already good and there are plenty of reasons to be happy. When we practice gratitude we become happy, right here, right now—which brings us more well-being and fulfillment than the *next great thing* of the future could ever promise.

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Quotation in text box: "The only time you can ever be happy is *now*." – Anonymous

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Whether you're a coach or a client, it's good to remember that positive psychology research supports what we may already know from our own experience—that gratitude is an experience for the heart, not a concept for the mind. That's why it was important to take an experiential approach with Brian's coaching, instead of simply telling him about the compelling research on the value of gratitude. Take a moment now to imagine the difference in your own life between falling in love, and reading the latest research on falling in love. The heart and the head have far different experiences. Likewise, reading about gratitude and happiness is completely different from experiencing them. So we hope you'll turn to the Activities section now and put your heart into feeling some gratitude yourself.

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Quotation in text box: "Make it a habit to tell people thank you. To express your appreciation, sincerely and without the expectation of anything in return. Truly appreciate those around you, and you'll soon find many others around you. Truly appreciate life, and you'll find that you have more of it." – Ralph Marston

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### **Coach's Case Study: Gratitude and Adversity<sup>2</sup>**

"I'm at the end of my rope," said Claire during our first coaching session. "I've tried everything I can think of to get Noah more motivated in school and nothing works. Two years ago he was an A and B student. Now we're lucky if he gets C's. He's actually close to flunking two classes this semester. His teacher said if he doesn't shape up soon he might have to repeat sixth grade, but Noah still doesn't care. And what's worse, Noah hates me now. Actually, I don't blame him. I've turned into an ogre. Every conversation ends with one of us either crying or storming out of the room. I'm so frustrated with this whole situation. Some days I wish I could just run away and leave it all behind, but I can't. So here's what I want out of coaching: I want to find ways to get Noah motivated so I can stop being such an ogre."

I asked Claire to tell me more about her background and a broader tale of adversity emerged. Claire's husband, Ben, had been laid off two years earlier, and after a frustrating year of looking for another mid-level manager position he had given up and started his own business. Despite Ben's long hours and dogged persistence, the business was still struggling to take off. Claire had become the primary bread-winner and was stretching to balance her full-time job as an office manager with her parenting and home responsibilities. "I feel like single parent," she said. "Ben's so busy trying to get his business started. I know I should be supportive but I'm angry that he's so unavailable and that it's taking so long. He keeps telling me that things will get easier in a few months, but I'm not sure I can holdout that long. I really hate our life right now."

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<sup>2</sup> Details that might reveal the client's identity have been changed and occasionally data from two or more clients has been combined to maintain client confidentiality in this case study.

As we talked further, it became clear that Claire saw herself as a victim of circumstances.

Wherever she turned, she was surrounded by challenges and stress. She valiantly fought to overcome the adversities, but when her energy failed her despair and frustration took over and she lashed out in anger. The angry outbursts relieved her stress temporarily, but they had devastating consequences on her relationships. Claire was painfully aware of her destructive patterns and how ineffective they were in helping her deal with the challenges. However, she wasn't sure what to do about it.

She paused for quite a while when I asked her what she wanted to accomplish from our time together. She was totally clear about what she *didn't want*, but hadn't given much thought to what she *did want*. After a few more clarifying questions, Claire chose two concurrent goals for our coaching engagement. First, she wanted to develop effective new strategies for relating to Noah and Ben that would also help contribute to their future success. And second, she wanted to "stop being an ogre." Knowing that negative goals (that focus on eliminating something the client doesn't want) rarely work, I asked her to rephrase that goal to put it in a positive perspective. "What would it look like if you were successful?" I asked. "I'd feel like myself again," she replied. "I'd be acting like my higher self, not like the ogre." The firmness in Claire's voice convinced me that she was ready to leave her ogre behind and start aligning with her "higher self." I also knew that this positive approach would help her discover ways to appreciate life again, even in the midst of her adversities.

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Quotation in text box: "Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal

into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.” – Melody Beattie

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We used a variety of positive psychology tools as I helped Claire navigate the seven phases of our coaching engagement: (1) assessing Claire’s current state, including her strengths, resources and energizers (2) recalibrating her goals so they allowed for the possibility of success, (3) identifying what she had control over and what she didn’t, and then acting appropriately—accepting the things she couldn’t change so she didn’t waste any of her limited energy fighting them, and taking full responsibility for the things that were under her control, (4) building on her strengths, (5) releasing her limiting beliefs, (6) enhancing her relationships at home and throughout her extended support system of family and friends, and (7) defining the contributions she most wanted to make in life. In this section of the Toolkit, we’ll focus on just one aspect of the coaching process, how *gratitude* helped Claire deal with her adversities.

Part of Claire’s stress was coming from the fact that when she looked at life, she saw it through the three lenses of pessimism. First, she saw her negative situations as *pervasive*. The stress and struggle were everywhere in her life, tainting her relationships with both Ben and Noah at home, and diminishing her effectiveness at work. Second, she saw the negative situations as *permanent*. She felt like the startup phase of Ben’s business would never end, that Noah was on a permanent downward spiral to failure in school, and that her life would always be one long struggle. Third, she saw the negative situations as *personal*. It was her fault that Noah was not motivated, and her problem that Ben’s business wasn’t bringing in income yet. This left her feeling totally responsible and isolated by her fear and her pain. When Claire mentally took on all the responsibility herself, neither Noah nor Ben could benefit from collaborating with her

on a shared approach to problem-solving. In effect, she was sending them the message that they were incapable of handling the situation. The more they lived up to her fears and expectations the less she appreciated them, and Claire's frustration and stress unleashed the ogre in her.

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Quotation in text box: "When a person doesn't have gratitude, something is missing in his or her humanity. A person can almost be defined by his or her attitude toward gratitude." – Elie Wiesel

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To help Claire achieve her goal of acting like her higher self again, one of my coaching objectives was to help her adopt a more positive, optimistic mindset. I knew that gratitude could be instrumental in helping Claire see life from a brighter perspective, so that was where I started.

I used the Gratitude, Resentment, and Appreciation Test (GRAT) to get a baseline measure of Claire's current state. Her score of 138 out of a possible 220 confirmed that her level of gratitude was in the bottom 10% of those taking the test, with average scores ranging from 157 to 199. I briefly mentioned the benefits of gratitude to Claire and how it had helped people in similar situations deal with adversities. "But the only way we'll know for sure whether gratitude will help you," I said, "is to give it a try. Would you be willing to experiment with some short gratitude activities in the background for three or four weeks while we also work on some other strategies for your challenges with Noah and Ben?"

Claire said she was so frustrated that she would try anything as long as I thought it would help, but added that she honestly couldn't think of anything to be grateful for. I realized this was going to be tougher than I thought. Claire's frustration-driven approach was not the best foundation for launching a gratitude practice, so I knew it would be important to eventually get her involved in designing her own gratitude activities to be sure she would stick with them. But

first, she needed some personal experience with gratitude and the positive effects it could have on her life.

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 Quotation in text box: “Gratitude is riches. Complaint is poverty.” – Doris Day  
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### *Gratitude Journal*

We started with Noah. Claire’s main complaints about Noah centered on how irresponsible he was. He just didn’t care about school or his grades. Now that we knew what she *didn’t want* it was time to look for the positive opposite. The positive opposite of irresponsibility is responsibility, so I asked Claire to spend the week looking for even the smallest instances where Noah showed some form of responsibility. We discussed the fact that even if Noah was 95% irresponsible, there was still a 5% window of opportunity where he was doing something right. The challenge for Claire was to find and focus on the 5%, and to be grateful for it.

After a week of experimenting we discovered that for Claire, silent gratitude was best. When she verbally thanked Noah for his responsible actions, it was such a dramatic change in her behavior that he saw it as manipulative and became suspicious. So instead, Clare kept a gratitude journal and wrote down three things each night that showed that Noah was a responsible person, and that he cared about his contributions in school and in life. Sometimes it was a struggle, and she had to really search to find three good things to write about. But over time, Claire began to see Noah with new eyes; and as she did their relationship began to change. The battles became fewer, and Claire felt closer to Noah again. If Noah said or did something that pushed her buttons and brought out the ogre, Claire would quietly leave the room and read her gratitude journal until she had gotten back to her “higher self” perspective and renewed her faith in Noah’s capabilities.



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Quotation in text box: “To live a life of gratitude is to open our eyes to the countless ways in which we are supported by the world around us. Such a life provides less space for our suffering because our attention is more balanced. We are more often occupied with noticing what we are given, thanking those who have helped us, and repaying the world in some concrete way for what we are receiving.” – Gregg Krech, *Naikan: Gratitude, Grace, and the Japanese Art of Self-Reflection*

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At the end of the four-week trial period, Claire took the GRAT assessment again and scored significantly higher. However, it was her personal experience rather than the higher test score that was most persuasive for Claire. The changes she was experiencing in her attitude, and in Noah’s behavior, were impressive enough that Claire decided to continue the experiment for another four weeks.

#### *Future Gratitude*

Now that she was comfortable with the gratitude process, Claire was ready for a new challenge. I asked her to add *future gratitude* to her daily journal by listing three things that she would most like to be grateful for in the future, and then imagining that they were already true. This was an effective way to counteract her habit of worrying. In the past, when Claire looked to the future she imagined the worst. Now I challenged her to imagine the best, and then feel grateful for it.

#### *Gratitude Board, Gratitude Letter and Gratitude Dinner*

I also asked her to tap into her own creative ideas to generate some original ways to express her gratitude. She decided to turn the refrigerator into a Gratitude Board, posting photos,

Noah's school papers, and little notes about the many things she was finding to be grateful for. She paused to reflect on these reminders for a few seconds each night before she made dinner, and chose one or two positive things to savor and appreciate as she cooked. She also expanded her gratitude journal to include things she was grateful for about Ben and his commitment to launching his business. She wrote Ben a Gratitude Letter which she read to him one evening over a home cooked candlelit dinner. Later that month they had another gratitude dinner as they celebrated Ben's company's first big order.

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Quotation in text box: "Feeling grateful or appreciative of someone or something in your life actually attracts more of the things that you appreciate and value into your life." – Dr. Christiane Northrup

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Claire's gratitude practice helped her see that the negative events in her life were not as pervasive, permanent, or personal as she had thought, and her pessimism began to give way to a more optimistic outlook. By the end of the school year, Noah's grades had improved significantly. This time Claire's tendency to take things personally worked in her favor. She felt that her faith in Noah's abilities and her growing trust in him to do well in school was a major contributor to his success. I agreed with her and smiled, noticing that Claire had made the shift to optimism. She was more likely to see any negative events as temporary, transient and not solely her personal responsibility. She was also beginning to see the positive events as *pervasive* and *permanent*. She frequently mentioned positive signs that Ben's business was doing better and commented on good things that were happening for her at work; and as Claire looked ahead to the future she saw the positive trends continuing.

*Conclusions*

When a client is grappling with adversity, gratitude alone usually isn't enough to break the negative cycle. Especially since it tends to have a sleeper effect—with the benefits taking a few weeks or even months to appear. However, gratitude can still be very effective as a background exercise for clients as you use more active coaching tools to address their immediate challenges. Over time gratitude can help change their perspectives, making them more optimistic and increasing their levels of happiness and well-being.

There are also a couple of cautions to keep in mind when using gratitude as a tool for dealing with adversity. First, if the adversity leads to signs of clinical depression in the client, the coach should immediately refer him to a competent therapist. Second, never ask clients to be grateful for things that they are not truly grateful for by setting up downward comparisons. For example, we would never ask Claire to imagine that things could be even worse, and to think of how fortunate she was that Noah wasn't getting all F's, or that he didn't have a terminal illness. As you'll see in the next section on Resistance, that's counterproductive and doesn't leverage the full value of the situation for the client. Instead, dig deeper into what the client really wants, and ask her to look for the small emerging signs that it might be true. Nothing is ever totally black or white, and even in the darkest of situations there is always some small glimmer of what the client truly wants to see. Teaching the client to look for and nurture these signs of hope is a skill that will serve them well in the future.

Gratitude is also effective for dealing with the minor challenges and adversities that life brings our way. So the next time you're stuck grappling with a problem, widen your focus and look for something to be grateful for. As Marcus Aurelius said, "If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself, but to your estimate of it; and this you

have the power to revoke at any moment.” Gratitude helps us revoke the power of the negative event by refocusing our attention and appreciation on its positive opposite. The new frame of mind that results puts us in a much better position to resolve any challenge we’re facing.

## **Resistance**

There are three main reasons that clients resist the feeling and practice of gratitude. We’ll explore each of the reasons briefly and look at some possible ways coaches can help a client work through that resistance—if the client is willing. Their ultimate willingness is an essential ingredient. We start with the basic coaching premise that the client should set their own coaching agenda, and that the client is the best judge of what “next steps” are most appropriate in their life. Therefore, if a little gentle questioning doesn’t release resistance and generate genuine interest in the benefits gratitude can bring; we suggest that you try a different approach. Gratitude isn’t the only path to happiness. Another route might be a better match for your client at this point in time. That said, here are the most common complaints and excuses people give for not feeling grateful, and how a coach might work with them.

### **1. “I’m too busy.” “It’s a waste of time.”**

These excuses are usually given by high achievers. They have a lot to accomplish, and not enough hours in the day. Gratitude would slow them down and diminish their accomplishments.

A simple way to work with this resistance would be to explore some short gratitude “nano-exercises” that don’t take much time. Try challenging clients to see if they can find meaningful ways to express their sincere thanks in less than two minutes a day. Introverts might choose to keep a nightly list of “Three Good Things” that happened

each day. Extroverts might prefer to thank someone in person or send a two-sentence email or voice mail to sincerely thank them for their kindness or a job well done. A few minutes of exploring ideas with your client will usually yield several ideas that can be completed in a minute or two. Follow up with a short reminder that it's not the amount of time they spend, it's the amount of heart-felt feeling they put into expressing their gratitude. Research shows that self-selected exercises that fit well with the client's values will yield the best results, so it's important to get your client's creativity engaged in the process—although at first you may need to prime the pump with a few possibilities to jump-start their creativity.

There may be a deeper issue behind the “no time” excuse however, if the client doesn't see the value of gratitude. If that's the case, consider what type of “evidence” your client relies on or accepts the most readily. Logic-based clients may be persuaded by some of the research on gratitude. Emotion-based clients may feel the value if you ask them about times they've felt grateful in the past, who they felt grateful to, what benefits came out of it, and how it enriched their lives. Experience-based clients might be willing to “try an experiment” for a week using a short, interactive gratitude exercise—like one of the nano-ideas listed above. At the end of the week, ask them to reflect on the results of their experiment. It's likely that their gratitude prompted some interesting new and rewarding responses. Personal experience is always the best teacher for any client.

Going deeper still, some clients—like Brian in the case on *Gratitude and Well-Being*—might have some conflicting beliefs around gratitude. They subconsciously may see gratitude as a roadblock to their success and happiness. If that's the case, then creating a safe place for the client to explore any hidden worries or fears may expose the

conflicting beliefs so they can be resolved using other coaching approaches. After the conflicts have been cleared the resistance often disappears on its own. Alternatively, you can take the direct route by exploring ways that gratitude could actually help the client reach their goals. Once they see that gratitude can help them rather than hinder them, there's no need to resist the gratitude—or the happiness it brings—any longer.

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Quotation in text box: “The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings.” – Eric Hoffer

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## **2. How can I feel grateful when there's nothing to be happy about?**

You're likely to hear this resistance if you ask a client to be grateful at an inappropriate time, like within a short time after the loss of something they valued, such as a job, and opportunity or someone that they cared about. There's a time and place for everything, and it's important to remember that despite its value in treating depression, gratitude is not a universal panacea. Most clients will need to mourn their loss before they can turn their thoughts toward gratitude. However, this response is also common in clients who have been stuck in a negative situation for a long period of time. If a client seems trapped in the negative emotions related to loss, such as anger, denial, or depression, then gratitude may be an important lever for helping them get unstuck.

One note of caution is important here. Coaching is not a healing modality. In cases of significant or ongoing depression coaches should refer the client to a competent therapist. Cognitive Behavioral Therapy is recognized as a highly-beneficial approach

that is well aligned with both positive psychology and coaching. In some cases, it's possible to continue to coach a client while he or she is undergoing therapy, as long as clear communication channels are open between the client, coach and therapist, and the client is functioning well in one or more areas of life. If the client is not able to function effectively in life, coaching should be discontinued until therapy has restored the client to a functional state.

As you begin to explore a situation the client would like to change, focus your questions on any areas where you can see the spark of something that they *do* want. Clients who think there is nothing to be grateful for are likely to have more clarity about what they *don't* want than what they do want, which is fine. Just spend a moment or two clarifying what they don't want, and then identify its *positive opposite* for your gratitude focus. For example, if your client says she's stuck in a dead end job, clarify what that means to her. Perhaps what she doesn't want is a boring job, with a disinterested boss and no chance for advancement. If so, the positive opposite would be an interesting or exciting job, with a supportive, helpful boss, and plenty of chances for advancement. Next, challenge the client to look for a few small pieces of evidence in her job right now that show some elements of what she is looking for, and direct her gratitude towards that evidence.

In this case, the client would look for any moments when her job was the least bit interesting, or that her boss showed any interest in her, or that anyone in the company was advancing in their careers—or finding good jobs elsewhere. If it can happen for someone else, it can happen for your client too. At first it may seem like grasping at straws, and there may be 95% evidence that the opposite of what the client wants is true.

But there is always some small evidence, either where they are now or in other opportunities that are around them, that can become the focus of gratitude. And once it does, then the situation usually starts to shift, as it did for Claire in the case on Gratitude and Adversity.

It's important to emphasize that we should never ask a client to be grateful for things they are not really grateful for. In Claire's case, it would have been ridiculous to expect her to be thankful that the C's and D's were not F's, or to be grateful that Noah didn't have a terminal disease. Likewise, with our dead-end-job client, you wouldn't expect her to be grateful for a disinterested boss or a boring job. And it doesn't help to remind her of all the people in the unemployment lines, or mentioning how lucky she is to have a job at all. That's not the point of gratitude—in fact, it's a waste of what some coaches see as gratitude's greatest power: the ability to help us transform our old limiting beliefs.

Our clients can always do a downward social comparison and find someone less fortunate than they are. But that approach doesn't make good use of the challenges in their lives now. To effectively use gratitude to turn their challenge into an opportunity to advance to greater success and happiness, we need to take four steps with our clients: (1) look directly at the problem, (2) clarify what they don't want, (3) identify its positive opposite (i.e. what they *do* want), and (4) find some small evidence in their lives that the positive opposite is true and be grateful for it.

"But wait," your client will say, "what about reality? I really do have a dead-end job and a rotten boss." We all like to have a firm grip on reality, and when clients are especially good at steps 1 and 2, they build up a huge mental database of evidence that



supports their beliefs that they are stuck in their job, or that people aren't helpful, or that they're always on the losing side of life—and that there's no chance of change because “that's just the way things are.” They are right, and they know it. But being right is not getting them where they want to go. To help these clients move forward, we need to help them release their death-grip on reality. No change can occur until they know what the change is and believe that it might be possible. Every great advancement in our civilization has come from creative visionaries who were willing to let go of reality and allow themselves to imagine something better. From the Wright Brothers and Thomas Edison, to Bill Gates and Mother Theresa, the ability to hold a vision that was *beyond reality* is the key to their persistence and their ultimate success.

If a client has both feet firmly planted in their current reality, they won't be able to move out of it. To get unstuck, they need to lift one foot up—off the ground of *what is* and into a new idea of *what could be*. And if they want to take a quantum leap ahead, like the top achievers in any field have done, then they may need to take both feet off the ground at once. That's why the practice of gratitude is so important. Gratitude grounds us in the new reality. It gives us evidence that the positive change we've envisioned actually has some substantiating facts to support it. And it reminds us to pay attention to this evidence, and appreciate it, so that it earns a larger place in our conscious awareness.

If a client gets stuck in step 1 or 2, a coach can remind them that it's a 4-step process, and support them in moving on to steps 3 and 4. In our dead-end-job case, that means identifying some small aspect of the client's work that *is* interesting, a sign that her boss or someone else in authority *does* have her best interests in mind. For Claire, it

was the smallest pieces of evidence that Noah had done something responsible, and then appreciating that evidence.

Once a client has made the effort to start looking for signs of what he or she would like to see, and feeling grateful for those small signs, then the coach's role shifts to one of support. We need to defend the small shreds of evidence that are emerging, and help the client nurture them with gratitude so they have a chance to grow. Stephen Covey, author of the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, calls it the law of the harvest. This law comes into effect every time a client wants to change one of their limiting beliefs. You have to plant the seeds and tend them if you want to get the harvest. Moving from "there's nothing to be grateful for" to "life is good and I'm so grateful" yields a big harvest, but it begins by planning small seeds.

Consider tomatoes. If you want to harvest tomatoes, first you plant the seed and then you water and nurture the plant until it is full-grown and producing tomatoes. The first week or two after planning a tomato seed you don't see any visible evidence that it's growing. It's often the same with gratitude. There aren't many visible signs of positive changes in the first few days. It takes time to build momentum. In fact, research has shown that gratitude is more effective when practiced over time, with 3 months being the optimal time frame studied so far. The Law of the Harvest applies to gratitude too, but those who persevere discover that the harvest of happiness, well-being and satisfaction with life is well worth the wait.

After a week or two, our tomato plant has pushed a couple of spindly leaves up through the soil. And perhaps our client's gratitude practice has yielded a few small glimmers of change or hope. Our clients, being totally focused on tomatoes, will have a

tendency to deny that this little sprout is important. “That’s *not* a tomato,” they’ll say in frustration, and if we’re not careful they’ll often stomp on the small seedling, crushing its chances for growth. Without a coach, clients often get frustrated or disillusioned at this stage and abandon their gratitude activities. It takes consistent acknowledgement and appreciation from the coach at each stage of growth, as well as steady reminders that the client is making progress towards their goals, to help them grow out of their old stuck patterns. However, once the client understands the process, and gains a few new data points of evidence that their new beliefs might be true, then the client’s own experience will begin to give them more reasons to continue their gratitude practice.

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Quotation in text box: “Reflect on your blessings, on which every man has many, not on your misfortunes, of which all men have some” – Charles Dickens

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**3. “I don’t want to be grateful. If I’m grateful for something that’s not perfect yet, it will never change.”**

It’s very tempting, and very ineffective, to approach this form of resistance with logic. This is a matter of heart, not mind. If you enter into a battle of the minds, you will lose. Instead, draw on your client’s past experience to engage their heart. Ask them to think of something in their life that they are grateful for—something that is “practically perfect” just as it is. If they can’t think of anything, try the approaches from item 2 above. If they do have an experience of gratitude, then delve into the details. Get their heart engaged in the positive emotions that the gratitude brings up. Once their heart is

involved you can begin to direct your questions in ways that help their own positive emotions and experience convince their mind that gratitude will not hinder or hurt them.

Questions along the following lines are sometimes helpful: “Looking back on the situation, did gratitude ever make the situation stagnate or get worse? Is it possible that your gratitude may have helped make it better? Is there a small (not major) situation in your life now that you’d be willing to experiment with? What could you be grateful for in this situation? Would you be willing to try an experiment, using one short gratitude activity each day, to see if it might make a difference? I can give you a few examples of what other people have tried, but your own ideas will probably get the best results for you. What could you be grateful for? And how could you express it?”

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Quotation in text box: “Gratitude is a quality similar to electricity: it must be produced and discharged and used up in order to exist at all.” – William Faulkner

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### *Tips on Managing Resistance*

When dealing with resistance, it’s important to start small—with very short or easy nano-acts of gratitude. If they work well, your client will be far more open to trying some of the more time-consuming or emotionally-involving activities, such as a Gratitude Visit. If the nano-acts aren’t effective, let the client choose. You can either try some of the other gratitude activities or switch to another approach. Again, gratitude is not the only path to happiness, and each person needs to find their own route.

For those who persevere, gratitude eventually becomes self-rewarding. Over time, the seeds of thankfulness that your clients plant will yield a harvest of kindness from others and feelings of personal well-being. But until your they start to reap these ultimate benefits, you can also build in some immediate rewards.

One client designed a strategy using one of her favorite motivators—chocolate. She bought a bag of Hershey’s Kisses®, and put five of them on her desk each morning. Whenever she expressed sincere gratitude to someone in a conversation, meeting, or email, she ate one of the chocolates. It not only gave her an instant reward, it also provided a visible measure of her progress. By mid-afternoon, if she still had five left on her desk she knew it was time to interact with her staff. If all the Kisses were gone, she paused for a moment and felt pleased with how many people she had thanked—and the happiness she added to their lives. As a side benefit, she eventually learned that much of the sweetness she was craving in life was fulfilled through her positive interactions with other people—not from sugary foods. Consequently, her self-designed gratitude activity helped her lose 10 unwanted pounds and gain several close friendships.

## **Assessments**

The following two assessments have been proven to be both valid and reliable in measuring gratitude. In scientific terminology, “valid” means that the assessments are effective in measuring gratitude, as distinct from other related positive emotions. “Reliable” means that they yield consistent results over time or across different trials; that is, if you assessed someone’s gratitude level with these tests and there were no intervening events to change the person’s level of gratitude, the person would get the same score when the tests were repeated in the future.

### ***Gratitude Questionnaire (GQ-6)***

Referenced in McCullough, Emmons and Tsang (2002), this questionnaire is also known as the *Gratitude Survey*. It can be used to assess the client's dispositional level of gratitude. The full survey is available at [www.authentichappiness.com](http://www.authentichappiness.com). Below is a description of what the scores indicate.

*Interpretation:*

This scoring results from the Spirituality and Health Web Site study conducted by McCullough at the University of Miami (<http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/mmccullough/gratitude/GQ-6-scoring-interp.pdf>). Based on 1,224 adults who took this questionnaire, here are some benchmarks for making sense of the score.

25<sup>th</sup> Percentile: A score of 35 out of 42 on the GQ-6 means you scored higher than 25% of the students who took it. If you scored below a 35, you are in the bottom 25% of this sample.

50<sup>th</sup> Percentile: A score of 38 out of 42 on the GQ-6 means you scored higher than 50% of the students who took it. If you scored below a 38, you are in the bottom one-half of this sample.

75<sup>th</sup> Percentile: A score of 41 out of 42 on the GQ-6 means you scored higher than 75% of the students who took it.

If you score a 42, then you score among the top 13% of this sample.

***Gratitude, Resentment, and Appreciation Test (GRAT)***

This questionnaire can be used to assess the client's dispositional level of gratitude. The full scale is available in the "main article" accessed through the link on the following web page: <http://e-archive.vanderbilt.edu/handle/1803/230/>. Below is a description of how to score the assessment and what the scores indicate.

*Scoring Instructions:*

1. Record your scores for the numbers listed in the first column. Add the numbers for total A.
2. Record your scores for the numbers listed in the second column.
3. Reverse score the items in the second column and record them in the third. That is, if you scored a “5,” give yourself a “1,” if you scored a “4,” give yourself a “2,” etc. Add the numbers for total B.
4. Add the totals for A and B. This your total GRAT score. This number should be between 44 and 220.

Step 1: Record scores	Step 2: Record scores:	Step 3: Reverse scores:
1. ____	2. ____	2. ____
5. ____	3. ____	3. ____
6. ____	4. ____	4. ____
8. ____	7. ____	7. ____
9. ____	12. ____	12. ____
10. ____	14. ____	14. ____
11. ____	20. ____	20. ____
13. ____	21. ____	21. ____
15. ____	26. ____	26. ____
16. ____	28. ____	28. ____
17. ____	31. ____	31. ____
18. ____	32. ____	32. ____
19. ____	37. ____	37. ____
22. ____	39. ____	39. ____
23. ____	42. ____	42. ____
24. ____		
25. ____		
27. ____		
29. ____		
30. ____		
33. ____		
34. ____		
35. ____		
36. ____		
38. ____		
40. ____		
41. ____		

43. ____		
44. ____		
Total A= ____		Total B= ____

*Interpretation:*

Based on six different studies, conducted across six years, of 1,187 students (Watkins, Woodward, Stone & Kolts, 2003), here are some benchmarks for making sense of the score.

25<sup>th</sup> Percentile: A score of 162 or higher on the GRAT means you scored higher than 25% of the students who took it. If you scored below 162, you are in the bottom 25% of this sample.

50<sup>th</sup> Percentile: A score of 177 or higher on the GRAT means you scored higher than 50% of the students who took it. If you scored below 177, you are in the bottom one-half of this sample.

75<sup>th</sup> Percentile: A score of 191 or higher on the GRAT means you scored higher than 75% of the students who took it.

If you score a 220, then you score among the top 98% of this sample.

**Activities*****Empirically Supported Gratitude Activities:***

The following gratitude activities have been tested and proven effective through empirical research.

*Counting Blessings* researched by Lyubomirsky, Sheldon and Schkade (2005)

**Instructions:**

Once a week, list the things you are grateful for and contemplate your list.

**Research Findings:**

- Subjects who expressed their gratitude once a week over the 6-week study showed significant increases in well-being.



- The intervention was not as effective when practiced three times a week. The researchers suspect that more frequent practice could lead to boredom, making the activity less fresh and meaningful.
- Shifting the focus of the gratitude to different areas of life may help avoid this adaptation. For example, feeling grateful for their friends in one session, for their job in another, and their home in the another session.
- More broadly, gratitude helps people savor their positive life experiences so they get the maximum enjoyment from them.
- Gratitude can counter the effects of the hedonic treadmill, keeping people aware of life's pleasures that they otherwise would have stopped noticing.
- Gratitude helps people reinterpret negative or stressful life events, which strengthens their coping resources and social relationships.
- It appears that gratitude is incompatible with negative emotions, and therefore may reduce feelings of envy, greed or anger.
- Gratitude can have a significant effect on people's short-term happiness.

*Three Good Things in Life* researched by Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson (2005)

Instructions:

Every night for one week, write down three things that went well and a short explanation of what caused them.

Research Findings:

- Participants in the *three good things* exercise began to show beneficial effects one month following the end of the experiment.

- At the one-month follow-up, participants were happier and less depressed than they had been at baseline, and they stayed happier and less depressed at the three-month and six-month follow-ups.
- Participants who benefited the most were those who continued to do the exercise on their own after the end of the one-week study.

*Gratitude Visit* researched by Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005)

Instructions:

Select one important person from your past who has made a major positive difference in your life and to whom you have never fully expressed your thanks. In roughly one page, express your gratitude to that person. Take your time writing this. Describe in specific terms why you are grateful for this person and how that person's behavior has positively influenced your life. Describe what you are doing now and that you often reflect on their efforts. Seligman recommends delivering this letter to the individual in person. Ideally, Seligman suggests "[settling] down, read your testimonial aloud slowly, with expression, and with eye contact. Then let the other person react unhurriedly" (2005, p. 74).

Research Findings:

- Participants in the *gratitude visit* condition were happier and less depressed, and showed the largest positive changes compared to other happiness activities tested, including Three Good Things and two strengths-based activities.

- The increase in happiness and decrease in depression were maintained at follow-up assessments one week and one month later.
- At the end of three months, participants in the *gratitude visit* condition were no happier or less depressed than they had been at baseline.

*Gratitude Letter* (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005) adapted and researched by Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky & Sheldon (in press)

#### Instructions:

“Think back over your life and remember a time when someone did something for you that made you feel extremely grateful. Consider your family, friends, teachers, coaches, teammates, employers, and others who have been especially kind to you but who have never heard you express your gratitude. Spend about 15 minutes writing a letter of gratitude to one of these people each week for the next 8 weeks. We suggest that you write to a new person each week, but if you prefer, you can write more than one letter to the same person. Tell the person specifically why you are grateful, how they affected your life, and how often you think of them. This exercise is solely for your benefit and you do not need to send the letter to the person, however you are welcome to show or give the letter to them if you please.

#### Research Findings:

- Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky and Sheldon’s (in press) study involved only writing and reflecting on the letter, not delivering and reading it in person. In this experiment involving 109 undergraduate college

students, the participants showed practically no improvements in well-being unless they were motivated to engage in the activity.

- Compared to their non-motivated counterparts, motivated participants reported improved overall well-being and fewer depressive symptoms at the end of the intervention.
- Motivated participants also showed improved well-being at the 6-month follow-up and reductions in depressive symptoms at the 9-month follow-up”

*Gratitude Journal* researched in Emmons and McCullough (2003):

Instructions:

There are many things in our lives, both large and small, that we might be grateful about. Think back over the past week and write down up to five things in your life that you are grateful or thankful for.

Research Findings:

- In one experiment, participants completed their gratitude lists once a week for 10 weeks. Participants in the gratitude condition were happier with their lives as a whole, and were more optimistic in their expectations for the week ahead. They also reported fewer physical complaints and spent significantly more time exercising.
- In other experiments, participants completed the gratitude exercise daily for either two or three weeks. The three-week intervention was more effective

than the two-week exercise, leading the researchers to conclude that repetition of the activity over time is important.

- Findings from the three-week exercise showed that people who were randomly assigned to the gratitude condition became happier, got more rest and had better quality sleep, and felt more optimistic and connected to others.”

### ***Non-Empirically Supported Gratitude Activities:***

Although no empirical research is available to support the effectiveness of these exercises, scientific research has shown that a critical factor in the effectiveness of any gratitude activity is that it generates feelings of true gratitude in the person (Emmons and McCullough, 2003). Research has also shown that gratitude exercises are more effective when the client is motivated, committed and invested in the exercise (Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky & Sheldon, in press). The person-activity fit is also important. Because each client is unique in their strengths, interests, values, and inclinations they will benefit more from some strategies than others (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005). Therefore, finding the best fit from the client’s perspective may be a more important selection factor than empirical validation. Extroverted clients may benefit more from activities that engage other people directly, whereas introverts may gravitate towards activities they can do on their own.

- *Thank You Note:* Send a hand-written or e-mail thank-you card, or surprise someone with a short “thank you” note in their lunch box, coat pocket or on their desk. Let them know how much you appreciate them, as well as their actions.
- *Email or Voicemail:* Send a 2-sentence email or voice mail to sincerely thank someone for their kindness or a job well done. State specifically what they did and how it made you feel.

- *Grateful Greeting:* Each time you welcome someone into your home or office, try starting the interaction with a comment about something you appreciate about them. Expressing your gratitude creates a safe open environment that fosters closer relationships and better communications.
- *Grateful Eating:* Make the first three bites of every meal or snack an experience of gratitude. Pause to really enjoy and savor your food. Appreciate the aromas, tastes and textures, and be grateful for the many ways the food nourishes you. As this practice heightens your awareness and enjoyment of the food you eat, you may find yourself feeling fully satisfied with less food at each meal—so you may have the added bonus of feeling grateful for a slimmer waistline.
- *Dinner Words:* Go around the dinner table and list one thing you are grateful for. This connects you to everyone around the table and creates a sense of community.
- *Gratitude Dinner:* Prepare a special dinner—or invite someone to your favorite restaurant—to let them know how grateful you are for them or to celebrate one of their accomplishments.
- *Gratitude Party:* Invite several friends to a party to celebrate the good things in life. Ask each person come prepared to say a few words about the things they are grateful for, so you can all celebrate your gratitude together.
- *Future Gratitude:* Each night before going to bed, write three things you are grateful for in your life right now. Then list three more things that you would like to be grateful for in the future, and imagine that they are already true. Reflect on each item for a moment, feeling the joy or peace or satisfaction they will bring you, and savor the pleasant feelings as you fall asleep.

- *Future Gratitude Letter*: Once a year, imagine that it's now one year in the future—and that it's been the most wonderful year of your life. Think of all the great experiences you've had, the delightful people you've met and the amazing things you've received or achieved. You can dream as big as you like, as long as you can keep your heart fully open with gratitude when you think of them. Then write a “thank you” letter expressing your gratitude for all these good things, as if they were already true. File the letter away until the next year, and then look back to see how many of the things you were grateful for “in advance” are now in your world. Many clients have been so impressed with their results that they've made it a regular practice, writing a new letter each year at the end of December or on their birthday.
- *Gratitude Board or Scrapbook*: Take scrapbook, piece of poster board or a small bulletin board and fill it with images of the things you are grateful for. Put the board where you will see it frequently—you can also use your refrigerator door or the frame of your bathroom mirror. Use photographs or pictures from magazines or the internet to spark your grateful feelings, and be sure to change the images regularly so the feelings stay fresh. You can also create a Future Gratitude Board, using images of things you would love to be grateful for in the future. Either way, remember that it's not the exact images you find, it's the gratitude and joy you feel that makes the exercise effective.
- *Gratitude Box*: In this three-dimensional version of the Gratitude Board, you use a small box or treasure chest to store objects, souvenirs or other mementos of good times from your past. Spend a few moments once a week looking through your Gratitude Box, changing or adding to the contents, and savor the good times you recall.
- *Gratitude Triggers*: Use typical events that often trigger annoyance—waiting in line at the bank, hitting red lights in traffic, dealing with slow internet connections or having your

phone call put on hold—as reminders to think of things you are grateful for. The waiting time may not be less, but you’ll feel much better by the time you’re in action again.

- *The Gratitude Game*: This is a great game for playing with kids at bedtime, in restaurants or on long car trips. Take turns telling each other something that you’re grateful for. The “winner” is the one who can think of the most things—however everyone wins when they focus on gratitude and you’ll rarely run out of ideas once you get started. If you don’t mind a few groans or eye rolling, you can try this with teenagers or at work too. After some initial resistance, you may be surprised at what you learn about others’ gratitude.
- *Grateful Sleep*: Follow the advice of the old Eddie Fisher song and *Count Your Blessings* instead of sheep. Although there is no scientific research to back this up, many people say this puts them to sleep quickly—often within just a few minutes. And even if you don’t fall asleep faster, counting blessings is definitely better for your health than lying awake worrying.
- *Book of Gratitude*: Submit an online entry in the Book of Gratitude ([www.digitaljournalofgratitude.com](http://www.digitaljournalofgratitude.com))
- *Volunteering*: Volunteer your time and talents to support a worthy cause or to help those less fortunate. Be open to receiving gratitude, as well as expressing it, to keep the positive cycle going. You’ll find volunteering ideas and opportunities at the Network for Good site: [www.networkforgood.org/volunteer](http://www.networkforgood.org/volunteer).

## Glossary

**Correlation**- describes the relationship, positive or negative, between two things. A positive correlation means there is a direct relationship between those two things, as the rate of one



increases, so does the rate of the other. In this chapter, you recall that there is a positive relationship between gratitude and well-being. A negative correlation means there is an inverse relationship. Gratitude and materialism have a negative correlation, that is, those who score high on gratitude tend to score low on materialism.

***Intervention-*** something that comes between two or more things, and despite the term's negative connotation of a problem that someone else needs to fix, positive psychology interventions refer to activities intended to enhance well-being.

***Maladaptive self-preoccupation-*** describes the tendency to be self-centered and focused on one's own problems and conditions, while failing to consider other people in a way that hinders one's social interactions, self-esteem, and propensity to experience positive emotions.

***Positive affect-*** the tendency to experience positive moods (Peterson, 2006). Moods are distinguished from emotion in that they are more pervasive and last longer. Some researchers describe positive affect as the basic component to happiness. The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) is available on the Authentic Happiness web site.

***Sleeper effect-*** there is a delay from the onset of the intervention to the time when there is a notable change in behavior or thinking.

***Subjective well-being-*** a person beliefs and feelings about their life as a whole. This is experienced by those with high levels of positive affect, low levels of negative affect, and to attribute that overall, life is good.

***Statistical significance-*** in statistics, this measure is used show that there is an authentic relationship between the two measures. Statistical significance predicts the probability of the relationship occurring by chance. The traditional level of statistical significance, also known as a p-value for probability, is  $p < 0.05$ . This means the likelihood of the relationship occurring by chance less than 5 percent.

### **Gratitude Resources**

***Gratefulness.org: A Network for Grateful Living***  
[www.gratefulness.org](http://www.gratefulness.org)

This international, non-profit organization offering a list of gratitude practices that are guided gratitude interventions. For example, their practice of gratefulness, a four-step process, involves first a description of nature referencing water and its wonders. Next, participants recall when they last expressed gratitude for water and take a quiz about their water knowledge. The results of the quiz lead into statistics about water and beautiful water metaphors. The personal value of water expands to the benefits the world derives from water. Participants are asked to consider themselves guardians of this precious resource and connect to a “community” of people who contribute by posting their commitment to the preservation of water on the web site. This one of many detailed interventions found on the web site.

***Radio Gratitude***[www.radiogratitude.net](http://www.radiogratitude.net)

Radio Gratitude is a non-profit network, sponsored by the Fund for Positive Media, features music and audio programs on gratitude. The programs are conversations with authors, artists, entrepreneurs and social innovators about how gratitude relates to joy, well-being and flourishing. The interview Mary Jane Ryan, author of *Attitude and Gratitude*, is an easy to follow summary of the research we describe in this chapter. The Grateful song by Karen Drucker makes a great start to any day. The “Thanksgiving Dinner: Food for Body and Soul” is an audio show that combines comedy and music to communicate the transformative power of gratitude. Your client can listen to on the web or download these programs as a pod cast.

***Café Gratitude***[www.withthecurrent.com/cafe.html](http://www.withthecurrent.com/cafe.html)

If you’re ever in the San Francisco Bay area, stop by one of the eateries in this small chain of raw foods restaurants. Their menu reads: “We invite you to step inside and enjoy being someone who chooses: loving your life, adoring yourself, accepting the world, being generous and grateful everyday, and experiencing being provided for.” Every item on the menu is named by an affirmation, such as “I am happy” (hummus) and “I am thankful” (Thai coconut soup). The wisdom and laughter resources on their web site will also leave you smiling and grateful.

***Gratitude Club***[www.gratitudeclub.com](http://www.gratitudeclub.com)

This link gives your client a brief description of the benefits of gratitude and offers free services like sending a gratitude card to express thanks. Your client can become a member of the gratitude club where they will receive weekly reminders to express their gratitude to others. At

the Gratitude Shop they can purchase t-shirts, mouse pads and even underwear that asks, “What are you grateful for today?” These visual reminders can help your client develop a gratitude practice.

***Go Gratitude Experiment***  
[www.g GRATITUDE.COM](http://www.g GRATITUDE.COM)

This site offers, “42 knew views on gratitude”. The aim of this project is to create a gratitude “wave” of people all over the world experiencing and expressing gratitude. Your client can sign up to receive a message of gratitude message to their inbox every day for 42 days. The authors have created a beautiful symbol for gratitude and an awes-inspiring video to go with it.

***Gratitude Books for Clients***

*Count Your Blessings: The Healing Power of Gratitude and Love*  
 by John Demartini

Practical guidance on how to turn stressful situations into learning experiences, transform fears and problems into positive actions, design goals that lead to life satisfaction, and create more loving relationships.

Paperback: 272 pages  
 Publisher: Hay House; 1 edition (June 15, 2006)  
 ISBN-10: 1401910742  
 ISBN-13: 978-1401910747  
 Amazon.com link: [http://www.amazon.com/Count-Your-Blessings-Healing-Gratitude/dp/1401910742/ref=sr\\_1\\_3/002-0403745-7691200?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1183591820&sr=1-3](http://www.amazon.com/Count-Your-Blessings-Healing-Gratitude/dp/1401910742/ref=sr_1_3/002-0403745-7691200?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1183591820&sr=1-3)

*The Thank You Book: Hundreds of Clever, Meaningful, and Purposeful Ways to Say Thank You*  
 by Robyn F. Spizman

For clients who need help expressing their thanks, this book offers a range of ideas for how to say “thank you” in personal or business situations.

Hardcover: 128 pages

Publisher: Active Parenting Publishers; 2 edition (February 25, 2004)

ISBN-10: 1563526514

ISBN-13: 978-1563526510

Amazon.com link: [http://www.amazon.com/Thank-You-Book-Meaningful-Purposeful/dp/1563526514/ref=sr\\_1\\_4/002-0403745-7691200?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1183595596&sr=1-4](http://www.amazon.com/Thank-You-Book-Meaningful-Purposeful/dp/1563526514/ref=sr_1_4/002-0403745-7691200?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1183595596&sr=1-4)

*Focus on the Good Stuff: The Power of Appreciation*

by Mike Robbins and Richard Carlson

This book is filled with practices, exercises and step-by-step instructions for applying

Robbin’s five principles of appreciation to express self acknowledgement as well as gratitude

for loved ones, friends, and co-workers.

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: Jossey-Bass (August 24, 2007)

ISBN-10: 0787988790

ISBN-13: 978-0787988791

Amazon.com link: [http://www.amazon.com/Focus-Good-Stuff-Power-Appreciation/dp/0787988790/ref=sr\\_1\\_5/002-0403745-7691200?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1183595596&sr=1-5](http://www.amazon.com/Focus-Good-Stuff-Power-Appreciation/dp/0787988790/ref=sr_1_5/002-0403745-7691200?ie=UTF8&s=books&qid=1183595596&sr=1-5)

***Other Gratitude Resources:***

- Gratitude web page by leading gratitude researcher, Michael McCullough: [http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/mmccullough/Gratitude\\_Page.htm](http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/mmccullough/Gratitude_Page.htm)
- Highlights from the Research Project on Gratitude and Thankfulness: <http://psychology.ucdavis.edu/labs/emmons/>
- Short articles on gratitude from Pema Chodron, Gregg Easterbrook, Sara Ban Breathnach and others: [http://www.beliefnet.com/features/gratitude\\_articles.html](http://www.beliefnet.com/features/gratitude_articles.html).
- The *Random Acts of Kindness Foundation* inspires people to practice kindness and to "pass it on"—giving others a chance to feel grateful too. [www.actsofkindness.org](http://www.actsofkindness.org)
- The film *Pay it Forward* is an uplifting reminder of the power of gratitude.

- This 3-minute mini-movie uses upbeat music, stimulating images and engaging quotes to inspire gratitude. <http://www.grateful-chain.com/?p=54>

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Quotation in text box: “Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.” – Marcel Proust

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## **SAMPLE CHAPTER:**

### **Visualization**

Back in the 1990's, if you mentioned that you were a coach it's likely that the response you got was sports related. "What kind of team—baseball or football?" The public mindset has deeply linked the concept of coaching to the sports world, and in the case of visualization, this can work to your advantage.

Athletic coaches have long used the practice of visualization to help individuals and teams optimize their performance, and it's widely accepted as a tool for enhancing success and achieving goals. Many of the clients you coach will have practiced visualization back in school on the soccer or basketball team—and even arm-chair athletes learn the value of visualization as they listen to top sports figures describe how they use it to get "in the zone."

Coaches from other walks of life have adopted the practice too, using visualization to help their clients achieve their personal goals, career ambitions, financial targets, relationship desires and even their spiritual aspirations. If you have a client with big dreams, stretch goals or high ambitions in any area of life, then visualization is a tool that is well worth exploring. Research shows that visualization is also effective for helping people cope with the small stressors of daily life.

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Quotation in text box: "To accomplish great things we must first dream, then visualize, then plan... believe... act!" – Alfred A. Montapert

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### **Overview**

Applied positive psychology is based on the premise that understanding and using our signature strengths can enhance our long-term happiness and well-being. These happiness-

building effects are particularly strong when we focus using our strengths in new ways (Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson, 2005). Visualization supports this strengths-based approach from a broaden-and-build perspective. First, it helps us broaden our creative thinking as we envision new ways to express our strengths. Second, it helps us build on future opportunities as we imagine applying the strengths in our daily activities.

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Quotation in text box: “The soul never thinks without a mental picture.” – Aristotle

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Visualization also helps build positive emotions, another cornerstone of a happy life. As we practice visualizing good things in our future, we can experience—right now, in the present moment—the same sense of enjoyment, mastery, achievement and happiness that these things may ultimately bring us. Similar to the practice of gratitude, positive visualization can lead to immediate feelings of joy, well-being, peace, contentment, and a deeply satisfying sense that life is good. From a positive psychology perspective, visualization is another possible doorway to happiness.

Take a moment now to think of something that you love to do, and that you do quite well. Imagine that you’ve discovered an opportunity to do this more often, and to express your strengths in creative new ways. What new things are you doing? Are you doing them with others, or on your own? Ideally, what results are you experiencing? See, feel and experience it all as if it were happening right now. How do you feel as you express yourself? How are people responding? What benefits has this brought into your life?

If you took the time to actually try this short visualization, you’ve taken the first step in a practice that’s been proven to enhance long-term happiness and well-being.

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Quotation in text box: “Dream lofty dreams, and as you dream, so you shall become. Your vision is the promise of what you shall one day be; your ideal is the prophecy of what you shall at last unveil.” – James Allen

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As we explore visualization we’ll look at it from several perspectives, including the:

- **Definitions and Descriptions**– what it is and how it works as defined and described by leading researchers
- **Research** behind visualization – what scientists have discovered through empirical research about the practice of various types of visualization and their effects on people
- **Rationale** for including visualization in coaching engagements – why it works from a positive psychology perspective
- **Live Case** – a client scenario showing how visualization can be used as a coaching tool
- **Resistance** – why clients might resist visualizing and what to do about it
- **Assessments** – There are currently no applicable positive psychology assessments available for visualization
- **Activities** – a variety of ways that a client can use visualization to increase their happiness, reduce their stress and achieve their goals
- **Resources** – Articles, books, websites and other resources for further information on this topic for coaches and clients
- **References** – The sources used as the knowledge foundation for this work

## Definitions and Descriptions

The first thing you’ll notice as you delve into the psychological research on visualization is that psychologists refer to it by a wide variety of terms, including mental simulation, best possible selves, future self imagery, imagination, expectation, fantasy, self-relevant scenarios, self-relevant imagery, and imagery-based rehearsal, to name a few. Each of these terms has a

slightly different connotation; however, *mental simulation* is the term most commonly used in the recent psychological literature. Therefore, we'll focus on mental simulation and one of its common subsets, mental practice, in this section, and weave in the other related research where applicable. In addition, to simplify matters in the coaching segment of the Toolkit, we'll use the word *visualization* as an umbrella term to encompass all of these related research topics as we apply them to coaching.

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Quotation in text box: "Imagination is everything. It is the preview of life's coming attractions."

– Albert Einstein

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#### *What mental simulation is*

The term mental simulation is used to describe any time that the mind imitates a state or an event. Mental simulation takes the form of replaying past events, constructing hypothetical situations, and fantasizing (Taylor, Pham, Rivkin & Armor, 1998). Some people see the scenes and images clearly and in bright, vivid colors. Others don't *see* much when they visualize and may have a stronger auditory component to their mental constructions. There are two different types of mental simulation: process and outcome.

1. Process simulation includes simulating the steps needed to get to that goal and may facilitate goal-directed action.
2. Outcome simulation refers to seeing oneself in the desired end state and may increase self-efficacy.

*Mental practice* involves using mental simulation to enhance performance in the absence of physical movement. Athletes have been the largest recipients of such interventions,

showing that mental practice enhances performance and sometimes nearly as much as actual physical practice.

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Quotation in text box: “I never hit a shot, not even in practice, without having a very sharp, in-focus picture of it in my head. First I see the ball where I want it to finish, nice and white and sitting up high on the bright green grass. Then the scene quickly changes, and I see the ball going there: its path, trajectory, and shape, even its behavior on landing. Then there is a sort of fade-out, and the next scene shows me making the kind of swing that will turn the previous images into reality.” – Jack Nicklaus

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In addition, mental simulation is used in cognitive therapy to prevent relapse amongst high-risk populations. For example, a recovering alcoholic visualizing what actions he will take at the next Superbowl party to stay on track. In this way, mental simulation provides coping skills for dealing with difficult situations (Taylor et al., 1998). It is also used in the healthcare field to facilitate healing (Pelletier, 2002; Tusek, Church, Strong, Grass, & Fazio, 1997).

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Quotation in text box: “A couple of times a day I sit quietly and visualize my body fighting the AIDS virus. It's the same as me sitting and seeing myself hit the perfect serve. I did that often when I was an athlete.” – Arthur Ashe

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### *How mental simulation works*

There are a number of theories about how mental simulation works and what mechanisms it activates:

1. **Increased confidence:** Mental simulation may increase one's confidence that the event will occur, putting the person in a state where they are ready for action.
2. **Advanced planning:** Mental simulation may simulate the sequence of consequences that may occur because of an activity. For example, "I will work over time to complete that new project. Then I will get a promotion, then my income will increase, then I will buy a summerhouse upstate," and so on. This makes mental simulations more like an action plan for accomplishing a vision.
3. **Physical and emotional readiness:** Mental simulation can produce physiological reactions in the body like increased heart rate, blood pressure and electrodermal activity (Lyman, Bernardin, & Thomas, 1980; Sheikh & Kunzendorf, 1984, cited in Pham & Taylor, 1999). The arousal created by these states can motivate someone to act.
4. **Emotional regulation:** Mentally simulating the outcome may decrease negative emotions like anxiety and worry that would typically get in the way of a person reaching their goals.

Drawing on these four mechanisms, mental simulation can increase self-efficacy. For example, when a student visualizes herself as a doctor, the image makes the goal seem more likely to be within her reach and thus increases self-efficacy (Pham & Taylor, 1999). Many studies support that people who visualize an event are more likely to believe the event will occur than other cognitive activities (Taylor et al., 1998; Koehler, 1991).

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Quotation in text box: "Hold a picture of yourself long and steadily enough in your mind's eye, and you will be drawn toward it." – Napoleon Hill

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Mental simulation enhances goal-directed action and problem solving (Pham & Taylor, 1999). Playing an event in one's mind presents opportunities that might have been missed, such as imagining oneself going to the bank and then remembering that the grocery store is right around the corner. The flexibility of imagining how different circumstances might play out helps when a quick decision is necessary. A person could rapidly consider many options and consequences. Thus, mental simulation activates the brain's ability to search for pathways to achieve that vision, an important component to goal setting (Locke, 2002).

Mental simulations are more likely to appear true because they are realistic rather than magical. Taylor et al. explain this as, "Even an entertaining fantasy about acquiring great wealth typically begins with an unexpected inheritance or winning a lottery rather than with a cloud opening up and dumping the money in the front yard or some other impossible event" (1998, p. 430). Mental simulations are also typically specific, involve a sequence of events, and flow like a video, similar to the way they occur in real life.

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Quotation in text box: "The great successful men of the world have used their imaginations; they think ahead and create their mental picture, and then go to work materializing that picture in all its details, filling in here, adding a little there, altering this a bit and that bit, but steadily building, steadily building." – Robert Collier

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## Research

In their study of students preparing for a midterm exam, Pham and Taylor (1999) found that participants in the process visualization group (which envisioned various aspects of their



study process) scored higher than the outcome group (which visualized getting an A on the exam) and the control group (which monitored their study habits). Those in the process simulation group did not spend more time studying than the other groups, however their original estimates of how long they would study were more accurate than the other groups. Outcome simulation did not significantly increase test scores. In fact, participants reported studying five hours less than they had intended to, suggesting that visualization focused solely on the outcome may have some surprisingly negative effects.

Oettingen and Wadden (1991) found similar adverse effects of outcome simulation in a study where positive fantasies of weight loss hindered participants from meeting their weight loss goals. This study divided 25 obese women into two groups. Those in the first group were optimistic about losing weight but had negative fantasies (worry) about the outcome. This group met their goals. Those in the second group had pessimistic expectations but positive fantasies about the outcome; and they did not meet their goals. Although this study differs from assigning students to a specific mental simulation, it does suggest that one potential flaw in outcome visualization is that people begin savoring the positive feelings associated with achieving their goals and do not appreciate the effort and action needed to make the goal happen.

Taylor, Pham, Rivkin and Armor (1998) explain that process simulation is more effective than outcome simulation because it promotes self-regulation. One component to self-regulation involves planning how to solve a problem by imagining it in one's mind. The second component is regulating one's emotional states by simulating what that event might feel like. This regulation of emotions can help break through a fear of doing something by exploring which emotions may come up, or energize someone to action by imagining the emotions that are associated with that outcome.

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Quotation in text box: “First say to yourself what you would be; and then do what you have to do. – Epictetus

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Another benefit to process simulation is that it may help to overcome procrastination. In Taylor, Pham, Rivkin and Armor’s (1998) study, both outcome and process simulation helped students get started on their project by their anticipated start date. The process simulation group was more likely to complete the project by their anticipated date, however, both groups fared better than the control group. Thus, simulation contributes to self-regulation in that it helps overcome procrastination and the planning fallacy—the overly optimistic expectations to complete a goal within a limited amount of time and resources. Mental simulation may accomplish this by reminding the person of their goals and helping them regulate their behavior accordingly. Taylor, Pham, Rivkin and Armor’s (1998) second study of students coping with stressful situations also showed that mental simulation was effective because it enabled participants to regulate their emotions and use problem-solving strategies.

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Quotation in text box: “Vision without action is merely a dream; action without vision just passes the time; but vision with action can change the world.” – Joel A. Barker

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### *Research on Mental Practice*

Mental training, a type of mental simulation used by athletes, has similar effects on goal outcomes. Feltz and Landers’ (1983) study showed that physical practice of a motor skill is more

effective than mental practice, however, mental practice is more effective than no practice at all. The most effective method is both physical and mental practice. Shackell and Standing (2007) found that mental training alone created gains in hip flexor strength at rate that was nearly as high as physical training (24% in the mental training group and 28% in the physical training).

Mental practice, yet another term used for this activity, is defined as the “cognitive rehearsal of a task in the absence of overt physical movement” (Driskell, Cooper & Morgan, 1994, p.489). The most impressive research on mental practice is Driskell, Cooper and Morgan’s (1994) meta-analysis on mental practice. A meta-analysis combines the results of several studies on a particular topic to answer questions with a higher level of statistical power. Their study involved 36 studies and 3,214 research participants. They found that effects on performance were stronger with physical practice than mental practice; however, there was a large statistically-significant effect from mental practice alone compared to control groups. In fact, the effect of mental practice was so strong that when the researchers ran a fail-safe test on the data, they found “that it would take over 4,100 additional, undiscovered studies averaging no effect of mental practice on performance to reduce the obtained relationship [to chance]” (p. 485). Although mental practice was effective for both cognitive and physical tasks, the more cognitive elements there were in the task, the greater the effect. The large number of studies and participants in this meta-analysis enabled Driskell, Cooper and Morgan (1994) to test many additional hypotheses.

Researchers calculated that the effects on performance were strongest shortly after the mental practice, ideally right afterward. Fourteen days after mental practice, the effect on performance was reduced to half. After 21 days, the effect size was small. For coaches using visualization with clients, these results suggest repetition is important, particularly for images

where the performance will take place in the distant future. Driskell, Cooper and Morgan (1994) recommend practicing on a one to two week schedule for maximum benefit.

Researchers also tested the effect of previous experience of the task on performance. They found that novices with no previous experience performed better when they mentally practiced cognitive tasks rather than physical tasks. Amongst experienced subjects, there was no significant difference between the two tasks. In a coaching context, this suggests that mental practice will be an effective tool for improving the efficiency of cognitive tasks whether the client is a novice or experienced in the area. For physical tasks, however, mental practice will only be effective for clients who already have the physical skill set.

Driskell, Cooper and Morgan found that the number of mental practice trials did not matter as much as total time spent in mental practice. However, they found a negative relationship between time spent in mental practice and the effect on performance. That is, as time spent in mental practice increased, the effect on performance decreased. They calculate that 20 minutes of mental practice may be an optimal length of time for an intervention.

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Quotation in text box: “What we plant in the soil of contemplation we shall reap in the harvest of action.” – Meister Eckhart

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#### *Research on Best Possible Self: Expressing Optimism About the Future*

An image of your best possible self is a vision of your life’s goals blossoming. According to Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006), writing about your self promotes learning about your self, providing clarity about your goals, values, and priorities. There are numerous benefits

to writing. The research on best possible selves integrates these interventions. In King's (2001) study, participants wrote about their best possible self for 20 minutes a day for four consecutive days. Compared to the control group, those who wrote about their best possible self had increases in positive mood and psychological well-being, as well as fewer visits to the health clinic for illnesses.

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Quotation in text box: "A vision is not just a picture of what could be; it is an appeal to our better selves, a call to become something more." – Rosabeth Moss Kanter

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Building on King's research, Sheldon and Lyubomirsky (2006) conducted a study comparing a gratitude and best possible self intervention against controls. They found that best possible self increased positive affect and decreased negative affect both immediately after the intervention and several months later. Participants were also more motivated to continue the exercise. Compared to both the control and gratitude group, those in the best possible self group were more motivated to continue doing the exercise after the study. Using statistics to predict the long-term outcome of the interventions, they found that best possible self was the only intervention that significantly increased positive affect and decreased negative affect four months after the intervention. The researchers suggested that since the intervention was inherently self-related, participants were more motivated and self-determined to complete the intervention and did it more frequently.

Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky and Sheldon (in press) referred to the best possible self exercises as "optimism about the future". They studied the effects of expressing gratitude or optimism, and what moderated this effect. The individuals who approached the exercise with

higher commitment experienced the most benefit to their health and well-being. Dickerhoof, Lubomirsky, and Sheldon (in press) found that motivation, person-activity-fit (the degree to which the task meets the individual's goals and needs), effort, and continued practice, all determined the effectiveness of the intervention.

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Quotation in text box: "People only see what they are prepared to see." – Ralph Waldo Emerson

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### *Mental Simulation and Coping*

Research on mental simulation builds on Pennebaker's work on the positive impact of emotional writing for people dealing with adversities (Pennebaker & Beall, 1986; Pennebaker, Colder, & Sharp, 1990; Pennebaker, Kiecolt-Glaser & Glaser, 1988). Pennebaker's studies showed that confronting stressful experiences had a positive impact on well-being and the more negative emotion the participants released into their writing the better they felt. Rivkin and Taylor (1999) suggest that one of the many benefits of writing down stressful events is that it "translat[es] into concrete mental images" which facilitates adjustment and coping (p. 1451).

The aforementioned benefits of mental simulation on goal setting and problem solving can also be used in coping. Imagining a situation in one's mind helps the person work out the details of the event, regulate their emotional responses to the event, and create a plan for solving the problem (Rivkin & Taylor, 1999). Researchers suggested that the ability to work through adverse situations, either on paper or in the mind, gives people an opportunity to gain clarity over the situation, change their thinking pattern, and find meaning in the situation.

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Quotation in text box: “Everyone takes the limits of his own vision for the limits of the world.” –

Arthur Schopenhauer

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Sticking with their hypothesis, that process visualization was more effective than outcome visualization, Rivkin and Taylor’s (1999) assigned students to either visualize the details of a stressful situation in their lives that was within their control, visualize that stressful event resolving itself, or take part in a control group activity. Those that visualized the stressful event in detail scored higher on positive affect, particularly on measures such as satisfaction with life, energy, social interest and support, optimism and mental clarity. They were also more likely to accept the problem and use active coping skills to deal with the problem (e.g., positive reinterpretation and seeking social supports). Similarly to Pennebaker’s research, it was assumed that these short-term effects would lead to long-term benefits in coping with the situation.

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Quotation in text box: “Most people are not really free. They are confined by the niche in the world that they carve out for themselves. They limit themselves to fewer possibilities by the narrowness of their vision.” – V. S. Naipaul

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### *Mental Simulation and Healing*

Another application for mental simulation is in the growing field of mind-body interventions. Two of the mind-body interventions that are accepted and widely practiced in Western medicine include patient education programs and cognitive-behavioral therapy. Alternative approaches to mind-body healing include meditation, hypnosis, dance, music, art therapy, prayer and mental healing, or mental simulation (Pelletier, 2002). These techniques have

been used to address a variety of medical conditions including allergies, asthma, dermatological disorders, diabetes, HIV progression, irritable bowel syndrome, post-stroke rehabilitation and peptic ulcers (for a complete review see Pelletier, 2002).

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Quotation in text box: “I see rejection in my skin, worry in my cancers, bitterness and hate in my aching joints. I failed to take care of my mind, and so my body now goes to hospital.” – Astrid Alauda

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### *Mental Simulation and Habit Control*

Mental simulation can also be an effective support mechanism for changing ingrained habits. Wynd (1992) compared relaxation imagery, power imagery (imagining power and self-control over smoking) and a control group as part of a six-week smoking cessation program. At the end of the program, only 27% of the placebo-control group had quit smoking, while 67% of the power imagery and 69% of the relaxation imagery group had stopped smoking. A three-month follow-up showed that smoking cessation rates in the control group stayed stable at 27%, while the power imagery and relaxation imagery groups had abstinence rates of 52% and 57% respectively.

To study the long-term effects of guided imagery visualization, Wynd (2005) recruited 71 smokers from a hospital outpatient clinic. Thirty-eight practiced a 20-minute guided imagery visualization once a day for three weeks while the other 33 were in a placebo control group. At the 24-month follow up, only 12% of the control group had maintained their non-smoking status.



The group that visualized more than doubled that success rate with 26% of the visualizers maintaining a non-smoking status.

If visualization supports long-term habit control success for smoking—a condition that involves a physically addicting substance such as nicotine—then it seems reasonable to assume that it can also support the long-term success of eliminating other undesirable habits.

Quotation in text box: “The soul becomes dyed with the color of its thoughts.” – Marcus

Aurelius

### *Summary of Empirical Research*

Anderson (1983)	93 college students	<p>-Participants were told to complete a drawing task visualizing either themselves as the main character of an action, their best friend, or someone they know and dislike.</p> <p>-There were 6 target behaviors for the cartoons: blood donation, tutoring, taking a new part-time job, running for student government, changing their major or taking a trip over spring break.</p> <p>-These conditions were further divided into two groups, those who visualized completing the task (positive) and those who did not (negative).</p>	<p>-Participants that drew themselves as the main character were more likely to carry out the desired outcome. The higher the number of cartoon simulations created for an outcome, the more likely the participant was to want to carry out the outcome.</p>
Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky & Sheldon (in	355 undergraduates	-2 experimental groups (expressing optimism and expressing gratitude) and	-The participants who had significantly increased their well-being and decreased depressive

press)		<p>control group</p> <p>Once a week for 8 weeks</p> <p>-Baseline established before activity and effects measured up to 9 months after activity</p> <p>-Participants were divided into those who were motivated to make positive changes in their lives and those who weren't</p>	<p>symptoms the most were the ones who were motivated to make positive changes in their life and put in effort.</p> <p>-Immediately after the intervention there was no statistically significant difference between the groups.</p> <p>-However at 6 month follow-up those in the activities group showed increased well-being only</p> <p>-At 9 month follow-up there was again no difference between groups.</p>
Jarus & Ratzon (2000)	<p>30 children, aged 9-11 years;</p> <p>30 adults, aged 21-40 years; 29 older adults, aged 65-70</p>	<p>-Groups were randomly divided into physical practice and mental-physical practice of a task involving motor skill</p>	<p>-The largest effects were in the children and older adults group.</p> <p>-Although children and adults acquired the coordination faster, older adults were likely to keep it longer.</p> <p>-Amongst adults, there was no statistically significant difference between the mental and the mental-physical groups in performing the task.</p>
King (2001)	81 students	<p>-Participants wrote for 20 minutes a day for 4 consecutive days</p> <p>-Four groups: writing about trauma, writing about one's best possible self, writing about trauma for two days and best possible self for two days, and a control group which wrote about their plans for the day.</p> <p>-Assessments were recorded up to 5 months after intervention</p>	<p>-Writing about ones best possible self was associated with increases in positive mood, subjective well-being 3-weeks after intervention, and decreased illness 5 months after intervention.</p>
Newsom, Knight & Balnave (2003)	18 undergraduate students	<p>-Both groups had their non-dominant hand immobilized for 10 days</p> <p>-Experimental group visualized themselves squeezing a ball for 5 min once a day</p> <p>-Control group did nothing</p>	<p>-The experimental group did not have a change in the strength of their wrist at the end of the study compared to the beginning.</p> <p>-The control group had a significant decrease in strength.</p>
Pham & Taylor (1997)	77 undergraduate students	<p>-Five to 7 day intervention, visualized for five minutes per day</p>	<p>- Participants in the process group benefited from the intervention. They started studying earlier than the other</p>

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Three groups: process simulation (visualized studying in a way that would get them an A), outcome simulation (visualized having gotten an A), and a control group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>groups and scored an average of eight points higher.</li> <li>-Participants in the outcome group made small, non-significant increases to their score.</li> </ul>
Pham & Taylor (1999)	101 undergraduate students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Daily intervention for 1 week</li> <li>-Four groups: the outcome group (simulated having had completed an exam and scoring high), process group (simulated studying for the exam), control group (monitored the amount of time spent studying) and one combination group (both outcome and process simulation)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Participants in the process visualization group scored higher on the test than controls.</li> <li>-The process group was more likely to control their negative emotions related to taking the test such as anxiety, and process simulation facilitated planning on how to achieve the goal.</li> </ul>
Ranganathan, Siemionow, Liu, Sahgal & Yue (2004)	30 people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Twelve weeks of training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Mental training produced a 35% increase in strength in the little finger abductor and elbow flexor muscle.</li> </ul>
Rivkin & Taylor (1999)	77 undergraduate students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Follow up, 1-week later</li> <li>-Two groups visualized a stressor that was within their control: one visualized the event the other visualized the stressful event resolving itself. Thirdly, there was a control group.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Those that were in the event simulation group had more positive affect, both immediately and 1 week after follow-up.</li> </ul>
Seligman, Steen, Park & Peterson (2005)- Study 1	150 adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Internet based study. One experimental group where participants visualized themselves at their best and considered their strengths and a placebo control group</li> <li>-Baseline established before intervention and effects measured up to 6 months after intervention</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Immediately after intervention, those in the best possible self group were happier and less depressed than controls.</li> <li>-However, three and six months after follow-up, there was no difference between the two groups, and the depression and happiness rates were similar to that of baseline.</li> </ul>

Shackell & Standing (2007)	30 male undergraduate students; football, basketball and rugby athletes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Two weeks</li> <li>-Mental practice group visualized doing 4 sets of 8 repetitions on the hip flexor machine. The participants visualized increasing the weight by 5 pounds per day</li> <li>-The physical practice group did the aforementioned exercise.</li> <li>-A control group did nothing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The two training groups significantly increased their strength compared to the control group.</li> <li>-The mental training group's strength increased by 23.7% and the physical training group increased by 28.3%.</li> </ul>
Sherman & Anderson (1987)	65 psychotherapy clients	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Four therapy sessions</li> <li>-Three groups, an experimental group simulated and explained reasons to stay in a program. A second group stated expectations for therapy. The control group simulated an unrelated event.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Participant in the mental simulation group were significantly more likely to stay in the program four weeks later.</li> </ul>
Sheldon & Lyubomirsky (2006)	57 students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Four week longitudinal study</li> <li>-Three groups: expressing gratitude, visualizing best possible self and a control.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-All the groups (including controls) had immediate decreased negative affect.</li> <li>-The best possible self group was the only one to increase immediate positive affect. Gratitude also boosted positive affect but not as much as the visualization group.</li> <li>-The best possible self exercise got the most motivation ratings, people were most interested in continuing it.</li> <li>-Those who continued the exercise on their own experienced the most happiness.</li> <li>-There was no long term effect at follow-up</li> </ul>
Taylor, Pham, Rivkin & Armor (1998) Study 1	84 undergraduate students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Daily intervention of 5 minutes of visualization for 1 week.</li> <li>-Three groups, process simulation (visualized the steps to completing a project), outcome</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Both the process and the outcome groups were more likely to begin their project on time compared to the control group.</li> <li>-However the process group was much more likely to have complete the project on time. Although the outcome</li> </ul>

		simulation (visualized the task as already completed), and a control group (self-monitoring)	group was also statistically significantly more likely to complete the project on time, compared to controls, the rates were much lower. -Also, participants in the process group thought the assignment was easier, compared to the other groups.
Taylor, Pham, Rivkin & Armor (1998) Study 2	77 undergraduate students	-Three groups, one visualized the details about how a stressful event occurred, a second group visualized the stressful event beginning to resolve itself, and the control group filled out similar questionnaires but was not assigned mental simulation -Data was gathered immediately after the intervention and at 1 week follow-up	-Those who visualized the details of the event unfolding were more likely to experience positive affect one week later compared to both the outcome and control group. -These participants were more likely to positive coping strategies like seeking out social support.
Ten Eyck et al (2006)	201 undergraduate students	All the participants focused on how to make studying an interesting and rewarding activity. Four groups: one group focused on how easy it was to generate reasons for studying, a second group focused ease of generating actions that would get a person to study, a third focused on visualizing the reasons, and the last group visualized the actions of studying.	-Participants who focused on mental simulation of actions towards the goal were more effective.
Wynd (1998)	84 adult smokers in a smoking cessation program	-In a six-week program, Wynd compared relaxation imagery, power imagery (imagining power and self-control over smoking) and a control group to determine smoking cessation rates -Data was gathered at end of program and at 3-month	-At end of program, smoking cessation rates were: control group – 27%; power imagery group – 67%; and relaxation imagery group – 69%. -At three-month follow-up the cessation rates were: control group – 27%; power imagery group – 52%; and relaxation imagery group – 57%.

		follow-up.	
Wynd (2005)	71 adult smokers from a hospital outpatient clinic	-three-week intervention that added guided visualization to a smoking cessation program -38 participants visualized personal states of health and wellness for 20 minutes daily; 33 served as a control group -Data collected 1 week and 1 month after intervention -Follow-up to assess smoking rates at 6, 12 and 24 months	At the 24-month follow-up, 12% of the control group were non-smokers, compared to 26% of the group that visualized.

### *Learning from the research*

Despite the fact that much of the self-help literature advocates visualizing the outcome, the empirical research on outcome simulations to date shows that they are far less effective than a process-simulation approach. In fact, studies show that relying solely on wishful thinking not only failed to help students achieve their goals, it also hindered their ability to do so. Process simulation was suggested as the preferred approach because it involves both strategic planning and emotional regulation.

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Quotation in text box: “Visualization is daydreaming with a purpose.” – Bo Bennett

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Research suggests that integrating process-oriented goal setting and emotional expression into the visualization process with clients is an effective approach for coaches. An optimistic, rather than pessimistic, outlook on their ultimate chances for achieving their goal was also a key success factor. Therefore a coaching plan focused on building optimism is important. Finally, the combination of mental training and physical training was shown to be more effective than

physical training alone, indicating that adding a visualization component to any physical or mental learning task may also be beneficial.

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Quotation in text box: “An optimist is a person who sees only the lights in the picture, whereas a pessimist sees only the shadows. An idealist, however, is one who sees the light and the shadows, but in addition sees something else: the possibility of changing the picture, of making the lights prevail over the shadows.” – Felix Adler

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Research indicates that emotional regulation and problem solving are important active mechanisms in visualization. Therefore, coaches would be most successful in using visualization for adversities that are within the client’s control (for example, an argument with a spouse as opposed to the terrorist attack on September 11<sup>th</sup>). One might assume that if emotional regulation and problem solving are the key components of visualizing, clients would benefit most from visualizing a present or ongoing stressor as opposed to a past event. This way they could create an action plan for dealing with the situation in the future. However, Rivkin and Taylor (1999) suggest that since mental simulation seems to produce similar results to Pennebaker’s work on dealing with post-traumatic stress by confronting the situation in writing or talking about it, visualization may work equally well when applied to past situations.

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Quotation in text box: “There is more to us than we know. If we can be made to see it, perhaps for the rest of our lives we will be unwilling to settle for less.” – Kurt Hahn

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And finally, visualization of possible selves can help in decision making. Markus and Nurius (1986) contend that many of the important decisions we make involve a process of imaging the self under a variety of alternative outcomes. In some decisions—such as deciding where to live, which job offer to select or what car to buy—individuals can envision a possible self, rather than the current self, to guide the process. This can give clients a broader range of options and perspectives from which to choose.

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Quotation in text box: “Cherish your visions and your dreams, as they are the children of your soul, the blueprints of your ultimate achievements.” – Napoleon Hill

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#### *General Recommendations on Increasing Happiness*

Broader research on how to increase happiness (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005) revealed some general guidelines that are also highly applicable to using visualization with coaching clients:

- Engage in a variety of new activities that relate to your values and interests
- Make a habit of initiating the activities, but be creative in changing the timing, focus, and type of activities so they don’t become boring
- Avoid basing your happiness on acquiring certain objects or circumstances (e.g. buying a new car, moving to Hawaii or getting a raise) because you will tend to habituate to such stable factors
- You can deter, or at least delay, habituation to the good things in life by actively appreciating them or engaging with them in other positive ways (e.g. consciously



enjoy driving the car, savor the Hawaiian environment, or set aside a certain percentage of your raise to spend on something special once each month).

- Stay active. In order to create sustainable changes in your level of happiness, you need to consciously and intentionally change your activities, and keep them aligned with your values and interests.

In addition, when using interventions with clients, Dickerhoof, Lubomirsky, and Sheldon (in press) found four key elements that determined the overall effectiveness of a particular activity:

- Motivation – How motivated was the client to do the activity?
- Person-activity-fit – How well did the focus of the activity meet the individual’s goals and needs?
- Effort – How much effort did the client put into the activity?
- Continued practice – How long, how often, or how regularly did the individual do the activity?

Person-activity fit may be the best place to start, because clients are likely to be more motivated to practice activities that they perceive to be a good fit. This higher motivation then leads to greater effort and continued practice. If coaches focus on getting the client-activity fit right, the other success factors may well take care of themselves.

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Quotation in text box: “Make sure you visualize what you really want, not what someone else wants for you.” – Jerry Gillies

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## Rationale

Over the years, athletic coaches have consistently used visualization with their players for good reasons. The visualization process, when done correctly, helps people (1) clarify and fine tune their goals, (2) understand the key steps to achieving each goal, and (3) anticipate and deal with the emotional reactions they may have as they take each step in the process.

If visualization has not been an effective tool for you or your clients, it may be because you've been taking an outcome approach instead of a process approach. For clients who tend to set unrealistic goals or who cling to a fantasy that is not serving them, switching to an approach that helps clients visualize the key steps in the process of achieving their goals may yield better results.

Clients also have different natural dispositions when it comes to *visualization* and their approaches are not always *visual*. For visually-oriented clients, visualization truly lives up to its name; but for auditory or kinesthetic clients the process is likely to take on a very different form. If your client has difficulty *seeing* the completion of each step towards the goal, work together on tailoring the visualization process to match his or her preferred learning style. Auditory clients may prefer to create a short story about achieving their goals. Kinesthetic clients may imagine themselves acting out each step of the process. Drawing on your clients' natural strengths and learning styles to customize a coaching tool specifically for them is always a good approach.

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Quotation in text box: "Your vision will become clear only when you can look into your own heart. Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakens." – Carl Jung

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It also helps to match their emotional style. Clients who tend to be over-emotional or under-emotional may benefit from an approach that focuses more on emotional regulation, which can help them build emotional intelligence. What emotions come up for them as they envision each step of the goal achievement process? You can use visualization to help them anticipate and work through many of their fears or frustrations before they actually encounter them. Visualization can also help them learn to recognize and *own* their successes—and to feel they truly deserve them—so they can truly savor the victories as they occur.

### **Coach's Case Study: Visualization<sup>3</sup>**

When Amanda and I first started working together, she was an applications processor in a mid-sized financial services firm. She had a passion for IT (information technology) and a talent for strategic thinking, but her vision for her future held only frustration because she felt she lacked the education and credentials to move ahead. She had completed just one year of college and a couple of short IT training programs on network basics. “Not enough,” she told me, “to get a real job in IT.”

“I have no self-confidence. That’s my biggest problem,” said Amanda during our introductory coaching session. She went on to list more than a dozen other things she was dissatisfied with in herself, brilliantly articulating how each of her shortcomings was holding her back in life. I’ve rarely heard a client be so honest in an initial interview—or so pessimistic. Her negative expectations were so strong that I began to wonder whether a competent therapist might have more to offer her than a coaching could provide. Then she mentioned that her friend Jordy, a former client I had worked with two years earlier, had shared some coaching exercises

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<sup>3</sup> Details that might reveal the client’s identity have been changed and occasionally data from two or more clients has been combined to maintain client confidentiality in this case study.

with her. Amanda felt they were very helpful and was eager to learn more about coaching approaches that could help her build more self-confidence and advance her career. We discussed the limits of what coaching could and couldn't do, and what a strengths-based approach might have to offer her. "I'd like to do this," she said; and she convinced me, so we agreed on a two-month trial period.

The two goals Amanda articulated—to build her sense of self-confidence and to advance her career—became our initial coaching focus. We used a variety of positive psychology tools to enhance Amanda's strengths and leverage her opportunities as we explored the seven phases of our coaching engagement: (1) assessing Amanda's strengths, capabilities, opportunities, resources and energizers, (2) setting meaningful, fulfilling and achievable goals, as well as a process to achieve them, (3) reducing the energy drains that were depleting her vitality, (4) accentuating and building on her strengths, (5) diminishing the power of her limiting beliefs and her pessimistic approach to life, (6) building a supportive network of relationships at work and at home, and (7) defining the key contributions she wanted to make in life. In this section of the Toolkit, we'll focus on how visualization helped Amanda discover an energizing new vision of herself and her future that gave her the courage and confidence to leap ahead in her career.

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 Quotation in text box: "Where there is no vision, there is no hope." – George Washington Carver  
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#### *Assessments to Support Visualization Work*

Our coaching began by exploring what Amanda valued most in life and what made her happy. We incorporated insights gained from four positive psychology assessments available on Seligman's Authentic Happiness web site, [www.authentichappiness.org](http://www.authentichappiness.org): the Optimism Test, the

PANAS Questionnaire (which measures positive and negative affect), the Approaches to Happiness Questionnaire (which measures the proportional contributions of pleasure, engagement and meaning to overall happiness), and the Via Signature Strengths assessment.

The assessments and conversations showed that Amanda was a dyed-in-the-wool pessimist. In martial arts terminology, she had could have earned a black belt in *worrying*. “The good news is,” I told her, “you have excellent visualization skills. The bad news is you use them to visualize the wrong things. Our next goal is to put those excellent skills to work on envisioning the right material.”

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 Quotation in text box: “What you think is what you get.” – George Lavenia  
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### *Ideal Self Exercise*

To help Amanda build a strong positive image that she could use as the basis for her visualization, I asked her to write about her Ideal Self—the best possible version that she could imagine of herself in the future. Amanda’s technical mind needed an empirically-proven approach, so I highlighted positive psychology research on Best Possible Selves (King, 2001; Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2006) and Ideal Selves (Boyatzis & Akrivou, 2006) in our conversations.

According to Boyatzis and Akrivou, the “ideal self is a primary source of positive affect and psychophysiological arousal helping provide the drive for intentional change” (p. 624). That is, the Ideal Self is a prime source of our happiness as well as our motivation for making positive changes in our lives. They believe that our Ideal Self is composed of three key components: an image of our desired future, hope (which includes optimism and a sense of self-efficacy), and a

solid understanding of our core identity (including current strengths and other positive attributes). All three elements are necessary—without them, we won’t be able to regenerate the levels of drive and motivation necessary to make long-term personal changes.

Amanda spent several weeks crafting the framework for her ideal self vision. As she worked, we also explored ways she could enhance her signature strengths, and increase her sense of optimism and hope. Because she was a voracious reader, I knew that a good book would help inspire her as she experimented with positive new ways of thinking. I recommended *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, McKee & Boyatzis, 2002), a book that Boyatzis, the leading Ideal Self researcher, had co-authored. In addition to reinforcing the importance of having a strong positive vision, I suspected that the book’s focus would inspire Amanda to stretch out of her former comfort zone and begin to recognize her own leadership potential.

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Quotation in text box: “A dream is your creative vision for your life in the future. You must break out of your current comfort zone and become comfortable with the unfamiliar and the unknown.” – Denis Waitley

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Amanda’s Ideal Self vision created a big but realistic stretch goal, positioning her as head of the company’s IT department. We developed a process-oriented visualization approach that focused on each of the steps that she would need to take to achieve her goal. Over the next several months she worked on envisioning each of the progressive steps towards her goal, and on working through any emotional resistance or limiting beliefs that came up regarding the goal. After each step was clear and she believed it was possible to achieve it, she took action. She

enrolled in advanced IT classes, spent time getting to know the key people in the IT department, volunteered to assist or take the lead on new IT-related projects, and offered constructive suggestions for enhancing the company's IT effectiveness. She reviewed and revised her process vision each month, and posted a copy on the inside door of her medicine cabinet so she could read it whenever she brushed her teeth. Her focus paid off. Within 18 months she had achieved a stretch goal that once seemed impossible: she was now Director of IT for her company.

### *Visualization and Success*

But Amanda didn't stop there. Along the way she had discovered that she had a keen aptitude for operations management. Senior leaders were already seeking her opinion on operational issues and she was occasionally asked to take on projects involving operations beyond the IT realm. Her aspirations expanded, and so did her vision of her best possible self. Her new goal was to become the company's Chief Operating Officer; so we went back to the visualization drawing board.

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 Quotation in text box: "Create your future from your future, not your past." – Werner Erhard  
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Amanda crafted a new Ideal Self vision with a process-oriented approach that she continued to review and revise monthly. In our coaching sessions, our focus shifted away from the more technical aspects of her job, which she had already mastered. Instead, we focused on the people-oriented managerial and relationship-building skills that were becoming more critical as she moved up in the leadership ranks. Amanda hated office politics but she knew that to become the COO she would have to learn how to navigate the social networks and play the political game. She was committed, however, to playing it with integrity. Her new vision

identified the key people she wanted to connect with and the actions she needed to take to build positive relationships with them. Once again, the actions that were inspired by her vision began to yield results. The CEO started to ask her opinion on operational issues, and he appreciated her results-oriented attitude. In one of their strategy discussions, he even mentioned the possibility of her taking over the COO role. Her goal was clearly within reach. But then, everything changed.

### *Visualization and Adversity*

Just three months into our work on the new goal, her company was acquired by one of the top three financial services firms. During their due diligence process they mentioned that Amanda's IT department was the best-run of any company they had acquired, and they had acquire many excellent companies. Amanda survived several rounds of downsizing and much to her surprise she was recruited to serve on the new divisional president's leadership team.

Amanda was suddenly catapulted into a position that was far beyond her current sense of identity. Despite the past visualization work she had done, she didn't feel as though she belonged on the top leadership team. Making downsizing decisions, fielding an impossible load of IT and operational requests, and dealing with the intense emotional turmoil of an organization in transition, was outside of Amanda's comfort zone and her worry patterns returned. Planning fallacy got the better of her and she was missing deadlines and failing to deliver on critical requests. As her stress levels rose, she stopped visualizing and retreated to old action patterns—relying on her technical expertise—instead of focusing on the current need to apply her leadership ability, relationship skills and strategic thinking talents. Over the next few weeks the situation worsened. People started criticizing her performance, and her relationship with senior leaders began to erode.



One of the key derailers of high potential managers is their tendency to rely on technical skills instead of relationship skills. To break Amanda's pattern of impending derailment, we had to get beyond her old technical-competency mindset. It was time to return to her leadership visualization, to revise the process steps she needed to take, and to focus on the vision daily so that the new patterns would become engrained. During our coaching sessions, we focused on mental training techniques. Amanda mentally practiced the actions she would take, the people she would connect with, the conversations she would have, and the results she wanted to achieve.

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Quotation in text box: "When I dare to be powerful—to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid." – Audre Lorde

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#### *Visualization and Stress Reduction*

Research suggests that in addition to enhancing achievement, visualization also helps reduce daily stress. This was certainly true for Amanda. The daily focus on her new vision eased her stress by giving her a clear action plan and emotional readiness. As she envisioned each step of the process, she clarified the individual actions she needed to take and identified any emotional challenges that might come up. Then we used emotional intelligence tools during our coaching sessions to work through the challenges using mental simulation. Over the next few weeks, Amanda's relationship-building work restored the trust of her boss and the divisional president, and her one-on-one conversations with other colleagues led to new levels of honesty in the weekly leadership team meetings. She also established a strategic plan to address the work backload problem and communicated it to the key stakeholders.

As of this writing, Amanda is well on track to reach her career objective of a COO position. She continually enhances her leadership skills and social networks, building her progress on a solid foundation of integrity and her most cherished values. Her personal and professional visions continue to be key components of her success plan.

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Quotation in text box: “Good business leaders create a vision, articulate the vision, passionately own the vision, and relentlessly drive it to completion.” – Jack Welch

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### *Conclusions*

If clients are in the midst of rapid change or are stretched beyond their comfort zones by the circumstances in their lives, visualization can not only help ease the emotional stress, it can also boost their confidence, their strategic planning abilities and their physical and emotional readiness to take action. Visualizing the process, rather than only the end results, helps them set meaningful and achievable step-by-step goals. Success can be achieved and celebrated, at the completion of each step instead of only at the end, which further contributes to the client’s sense of satisfaction and well-being. Mentally practicing the new behaviors and thoughts they want to acquire can also significantly accelerate their progress, making it faster and easier to achieve new goals.

When conditions become highly stressful, clients may jump into action mode and stop visualizing; or their visualization may switch from the positive (focusing on the steps to reach their goals and expecting positive outcomes) to the negative (worrying about their problems and expecting negative outcomes). Research shows that during these trying times a client could

definitely benefit from a coaching approach that includes process-oriented visualizations that are well tailored to the client's immediate wants and needs.

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Quotation in text box: "My method is different. I do not rush into actual work. When I get a new idea, I start at once building it up in my imagination, and make improvements and operate the device in my mind. When I have gone so far as to embody everything in my invention, every possible improvement I can think of, and when I see no fault anywhere, I put into concrete form the final product of my brain." – Nikola Tesla

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## **Resistance**

There are three main reasons that clients resist the process of visualization. We'll explore each of the reasons briefly and look at some possible ways coaches can help a client work through that resistance—if the client is willing. Ultimately their willingness is an essential ingredient. We start with the basic coaching premise that the client should set their own coaching agenda, and that the client is the best judge of what "next steps" are most appropriate in their life. Therefore, if a little gentle questioning doesn't release the resistance and generate genuine interest in the benefits visualization can bring; we suggest that you try a different approach. Visualization isn't the only path to success. Another route might be a better match for your client at this point in time. That said, here are the most common complaints and excuses people give for not wanting to visualize and how a coach might work with them.

**1. “It won’t work.”** (Spoken by a client who has not tried it.)

Clients who voice this type of resistance are basing their reluctance on assumptions they’ve made from other people’s experience. The coach’s goal is to get them to rely on their own experience. If your client values research, cite a few of the empirical studies that relate to the client’s goals, or talk about the results of the meta-analysis on mental practice by Driskell, Cooper and Morgan (1994). After your client understands the proven benefits of visualization he or she may be more willing to give it a try.

As a fieldwork assignment, set up a small visualization experiment. Ask the client to select a goal that he would like to accomplish, but make sure he chooses something that is not related to a serious problem in his life. You can compare it to lifting weights. You wouldn’t ask a novice to bench press 500 pounds; you’d start with smaller weights and work up to it. The same is true with visualization skills. Don’t start with the heavy issues. At first, it’s too easy for visions of worry and fear to take over when clients focus on their big challenges. So start small, with a goal that would be fun to achieve but that will not have negative consequences if it takes a little time to accomplish. After his ultimate goal is clear, use process visualization to help him see himself accomplishing the individual steps towards the goal. As he does this, you can work with any emotional resistance or reactions to the goal that come up along the way.

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Quotation in text box: “Visualize this thing you want. See it, feel it, believe in it. Make your mental blueprint and begin.” – Robert Collier

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Because process visualization offers opportunities to strengthen strategic thinking skills and build emotional intelligence, you can also comment on any progress you see in these areas. Your recognition and reinforcement of your client's global skill-building will add to his positive experience with visualization. Once he has successfully used visualization to help achieve smaller goals, and built a track record of personal success with it, he'll be ready to try it on larger or more challenging goals.

**2. “It doesn’t work.”** (Spoken by a client who has tried it unsuccessfully.)

Clients who have tried visualization and are convinced that it doesn't work from their personal experience are probably missing a few vital facts about how to visualize. It's likely that they were focusing on the outcome rather than the process of achieving their goal. If so, you can confirm that research shows they were right—outcome visualization is not only ineffective, it can also be detrimental, so that's probably why they had a negative experience with it. It's no wonder that they don't want to try it again.

Mention the research by Pham and Taylor (1997, 1999) which compared outcome-visualizers and process-visualizers to a control group that did not visualize. Compared to the non-visualizers, the outcome-visualizers performed worse, while the process-visualizers performed far better. You can also cite a few of the benefits that process visualization can give, such as improving strategic planning ability, test scores and emotional intelligence, increasing motivation and self-confidence, decreasing worry and anxiety, and overcoming procrastination. If she visualizes her ideal or best possible future self, she may also experience more ongoing positive emotions, life satisfaction, energy, social interest and support, optimism and mental clarity.

If these benefits are enough to convince her to give visualization another try, use the suggestions in the previous section to help her experiment with a new process-visualization approach to see if it gives her better results than her earlier attempts.

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Quotation in text box: “The most pathetic person in the world is someone who has sight, but has no vision.” – Helen Keller

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### 3. **“I can’t do it” or “I keep forgetting to do it.”** (For clients who are willing to try.)

Clients using these excuses may have a conscious or unconscious fear of success—and it’s probably for a good reason. It’s likely that the benefits they expect are not strong enough to compensate for the risks they anticipate when they achieve the particular goal they’ve selected. Ask them to list the benefits they’ll get from achieving the goal they are trying to visualize, as well as what challenges they’ll face if they’re successful in achieving it. You may find a mismatched set of benefits and risks, or possibly a values clash.

For example, if a client has trouble visualizing the steps he needs to take to get his next promotion, maybe he’s worried that the promotion will mean more travel, more time away from his family, or additional responsibilities on top of his already heavy workload. The benefits of a better salary and higher position may not be enough to compensate for the additional work. Or maybe he values the time with his family more than the promotion.

Once you’ve surfaced the negative aspects he’s worried about, you can help the client flip them into their positive opposites and see if it’s possible to include them in a

revised goal. The positive opposite of his worry about more travel would be a job that allowed him to stay home-based more of the time. The positive opposite of less time with his family would be more time with them. The positive opposite of more work might include more resources for getting the work done, such as an assistant or a larger staff. Our client could also see himself learning to use video conferencing to cut down on his travel, or see himself building a larger client base closer to home. He could mentally experiment with new ways to be more efficient with his time, delegate more tasks to others, or even ask for an assistant when he assumes his new role. Effective process visualization can help him identify and plan solutions to the potential challenges he see on the road ahead.

Ask him to keep a pad of paper next to him then next few times he visualizes and to jot down any negative images, fears or “yeah, but” reactions he has. “*Yeah*, I want the promotion *but* the boss will never give it to me because he hardly knows I exist.” It can also be helpful to have him note any persistent self-talk or mental chatter. In your next coaching session, work with him to identify the positive opposites of his negative images, beliefs and self-talk and include these new positives in an expanded version of his vision. In this case, the new process vision might include steps he could take to get on the boss’s radar screen and make his past and present accomplishments more visible. Let the client know that instead of letting the worries, fears and “yeah, but’s” stand in the way of his progress he can use them as tools to clarify his goals and expand his vision for future success.

For the truly forgetful, visual reminders can also be effective. The client can stick little notes in places that will remind him to visualize, like on the dashboard of his car, his bathroom mirror, or his bedside table. He could also set a reminder on his computer if he wanted to plan a short visualization break mid-way through the day.

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 Quotation in text box: “Nothing happens unless first a dream.” – Carl Sandberg  
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### *Tips on Managing Resistance*

When dealing with resistance, it’s important to start small—with very short, easy visualization activities. If they work well, your client will be far more open to using visualization for some of their larger or more challenging goals. If the first small experiments aren’t effective, let the client choose. You can either try some of the other visualization activities or switch to another approach. Again, visualization is not the only path to success, and each person needs to find their own route.

### **Assessments**

There are currently no applicable positive psychology assessments available for visualization.

### **Activities**

#### ***Empirically Supported Visualization Activities:***

The following visualization activities have been tested and proven effective through empirical research.



*Best Possible Self* adapted from King (2001)

## Instructions:

Imagine yourself in the future. Everything in your life has gone exceptionally well and your hard work has helped you accomplish all of your goals. Imagine living this ideal life that is the perfect realization of all your fondest dreams. Now write for 20 minutes about what you imagined. Repeat this every day for four consecutive days.

## Research Findings:

- Participants who wrote about their best possible self were happier, more positive and optimistic. They also had a greater sense of well-being, had less negative emotion, and were more likely to attribute responsibility for the circumstances in their lives to themselves.
- Long-term results showed that they also had fewer visits to the health clinic for illnesses.

*You at Your Best* adapted from Seligman, Steen, Park and Peterson (2005, p. 416)

## Instructions:

Think of a time when you were at your best and write a brief (one-page) story describing the situation. Review what you have written and reflect on the personal strengths you displayed. Read your story each day for a week and reflect on your personal strengths.

## Research Findings:

- Participants who wrote about themselves at their best were happier and less depressed at the immediate posttest than they were before the intervention. However, these effects were not maintained over time.

*Drawing Your Future* adapted from Anderson (1983)

Instructions:

Sketch a scenario in cartoon format with yourself as the main character. In each frame of the cartoon, picture yourself successfully taking the steps that are necessary to achieve your goal. Repeat this process at least three times over the next week and review your cartoons daily.

Research Findings:

- Two related studies provided significant evidence that envisioning and drawing behavioral scripts increased the participant's intentions to perform the actions in the cartoon scripts.
- The studies showed changes in behavioral intentions, not in the actual performance of the actions. However, the authors cite research showing that behavioral intentions are strongly correlated with actual behavior.
- Note: The researchers applied this cartoon scripting process to two goals selected by the researchers, rather than to the participants' self-selected goals. If drawing and envisioning behavioral scripts can increase people's intentions to perform actions suggested by a researcher, as in this experiment, we suspect creating cartoons may be even more effective in strengthening a client's intentions to take actions towards their own goals. The cartoon's three-frame format also creates a process-oriented approach to envisioning the goal, which has been shown to be more effective than an outcome-orientation.

*Coping with Controllable Adversities* adapted from Rivkin and Taylor (1999)

Instructions:

Note to Coaches: You can either ask your clients to write their responses to this exercise, or read the instructions to them aloud as a 5-minute guided visualization.

1. Think of a problem you're facing and visualize how it arose. Start at the very beginning of the problem, and picture the first things that happened. How did it start? Who was there? What were they saying or doing? How were you feeling or reacting? Visualize each detail of the first incident clearly in your mind, imagining it as if it were happening right now.
2. Recall what happened next. Go over each thing that happened and how it occurred, step-by-step. Imagine the events in your mind as they occurred. Recall each action you took. Remember what you said, and what you did, recalling all the details. If other people were there, picture what they said and what they did along with your own thoughts, responses and actions.
3. Now remember the circumstances that surrounded this event. Picture the environment. Where were you? What was happening? Visualize the details. Make a clear mental picture of the physical environment, of the place where the event happened. Notice any other people that were there.
4. Now imagine your emotions. How did you feel when the event occurred? Feel the emotions that the situation brought up for you. What were you feeling? Visualize the expression on your face, and what you did and said that showed what you were

feeling. Imagine each of the emotions you were experiencing and what you felt inside. Re-experience your emotions in your mind.

5. Picture how the entire event ended. Visualize the final details including what you saw, what you did, what you said and what you felt at the end of this incident. What specific things happened that brought the event to a close? Imagine a clear picture of the last part, the last incident that happened.

#### Research Findings:

Immediately after the visualization, participants reported more positive affect and stronger intentions to accept the reality of the situation. It also expanded the range of coping strategies the individuals were willing to explore.

#### ***Non-Empirically Supported Visualization Activities:***

Although no empirical research is available to support the effectiveness of these exercises, scientific research has shown that process visualization and guided imagery can help individuals be more effective in achieving their goals, coping with adversity, addressing health issues and changing ingrained habits and behaviors.

Research has also shown that such self-change exercises are more effective when the client is motivated, committed and invested in the exercise (Dickerhoof, Lyubomirsky & Sheldon, in press). The person-activity fit is also critically important. Because each client is unique in their strengths, interests, values, and inclinations they will benefit more from some strategies than others (Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005). Therefore, finding the best fit from the client's perspective may be a more important selection factor than empirical validation.

The following activities represent a few non-tested visualization exercises and practices that coaches can use as starting points. Ideally, the coach and client will work together to

customize specific visualizations that are uniquely tailored to the client's particular goals and circumstances.

- *Write Your Vision:* Select a goal that you would like to achieve; then write a short (1-2 page) visualization that describes the process of going from where you are now to where you would like to be. Include each step in the process, and build in plenty of details. Include yourself in the vision and imagine yourself thinking, saying, and doing everything necessary to achieve the outcome you desire. Build in an emotional component by describing what you are feeling as you successfully achieve each step. Note who else is involved in your vision scenario and how they are acting or responding.

You may want to break your large goals into sub-goals and focus on envisioning just one step at a time. For example, if the goal is to double your business within the next 2 years, a sub-goal might be learning how to give effective presentations so that you can effectively promote your business. The process vision for achieving the sub goal might include such things as going to a Toastmasters class, practicing your speaking for an hour each day, looking for opportunities to give small talks in comfortable surroundings and building up to more challenging speaking engagement, or joining the local chapter of the National Speakers Association.

Review and envision what you have written each day for a week, clearly seeing the images, experiencing the sensations and feeling the emotions. Repeat the visualization occasionally over the next few weeks and note any insights you have, ideas you get or progress you see in yourself or your circumstances.

- *Speak Your Vision:* Select a goal and create a visualization as described in *Write Your Vision*; then make a recording of it. Use as much enthusiasm as you will be comfortable listening to

when you play the recording later. If your recording is under-emotional the vision probably won't be inspiring; but if you are over-emotional it may be annoying. Find the happy middle when you record. Listen to your vision every day for one week, and then repeat a few times each week for the next 2 months. As you listen to the visualization, clearly see the images, experience the sensations and feel the emotions. Pay attention to any insights or ideas you get related to your goal, as well as any progress you see in yourself or your circumstances.

- *Visualization Board or Box:* Select a goal that you'd like to achieve and then search the internet, magazines or catalogs to find photos that represent or relate to each step in the process of achieving your goal. Put the photos on a piece of poster board, a bulletin board, or store them in a small box or scrapbook. Post the visualization board where you will see it regularly, or place the box or scrapbook somewhere you can easily review the contents. Although there is no scientific evidence to support this, many people find that early morning or just before going to sleep at night are good times to review their vision material. As you reflect on your visualization, remember to clearly see the images, experience the sensations and feel the emotions. Pay attention to any insights or ideas you get related to your goal, as well as any progress you see in yourself or your circumstances.
- *Visualization Triptych:* Search the internet, magazines or catalogs for three images that represent the stages of your journey from where you are now to where you will be when you achieve your goal. Use the first image to represent a visual metaphor of where you are now, the second image to represent the process you will go through on your journey, and the third image to symbolize your arrival at your final destination. Frame the triptych and hang it somewhere you will see it regularly. [Adapted from the work of Karol Wasylyshyn (2005) CEO and senior executive coach.]

- *Trigger-Point Visualization*: Use any regularly recurring waiting times in your life—such as stopping for a red light, waiting in line, or getting put on hold on the phone—as trigger points to remind you to focus on your current vision.

## Glossary

***Applied positive psychology***- as opposed to fields that primarily focus on theory and research, this field focuses on putting positive psychology principles and interventions into practice in fields ranging from education, health care, businesses, personal development and the like.

***Best possible self***- a representation of one's life after the person has successfully attained their goals and aspirations.

***Broaden and build***- this term, coined by Barbara Fredrickson and colleagues, describes the role positive emotions play in a person's evolution and the benefits of cultivating positive emotions in every day life. Negative emotions (fear, anger and disgust) enable people to fight, flee and conserve energy, which over millennia has promoted survival. Positive emotions, on the other hand, expand the action repertoire. People are more creative, social, open to information and resourceful. Positive emotions create psychological capital—a unique form of currency originating in the mind—which contributes to resilience and positive coping, as well as enabling new things to grow and expand.

***Negative affect***- a range of moods such as fear, anger, disgust and dislike. The term *affect* implies a longer-term duration than the terms *mood* or *emotion*. It is important to note that

positive psychology does not frown upon negative emotions. Negative emotions are a part of the human condition and alert us to something in the environment requiring attention. It is when a client gets stuck in a negative state, or when the negative emotion is not serving them, that changes should be explored.

***Planning fallacy-*** the tendency to be overly optimistic about the time frame or the effort required to complete a task. Research shows that visualizing the process of achieving one's goals reduces this effect.

***Positive affect-*** the tendency to experience positive moods (Peterson, 2006). Moods are distinguished from emotion in that they are more pervasive and last longer. Some researchers describe positive affect as the basic component to happiness. The Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) is an effective tool for assessing affect. It is available on the Authentic Happiness web site.

***Self efficacy-*** refers to what a person believes they can achieve with their skills under certain circumstances.

***Signature strengths-*** a foundation of positive psychology research and practice, this term refers to the strengths that people embody most in their lives. Peterson and Seligman (2004) have created a comprehensive taxonomy of 24 well-researched strengths, complete with a free assessment available on the Authentic Happiness website ([www.authentichappiness.com](http://www.authentichappiness.com)).



Research shows that identifying one's signature strengths and using them in a new way boosts positive affect, happiness and well-being.

## Resources

### *Additional Information on Guided Visualization:*

- *Visualizing Happiness*  
<http://pos-psych.com/news/derrick-carpenier/20070222123>

This inspiring and entertaining article by positive psychology practitioner Derrick Carpenter is an excellent resource for sharing with your clients.

- *Academy for Guided Imagery*  
<http://www.academyforguidedimagery.com/>

Founded in 1989 this organization is dedicated to educating and supporting practicing clinicians in using relaxation, imagery, and imagery related approaches in their work.

- *PsychCentral*

Practical Tips for Using Guided Imagery:  
<http://psychcentral.com/lib/2007/practical-tips-for-using-imagery/>

Answers to Frequently Asked Questions about Visualization:  
<http://psychcentral.com/lib/2007/frequently-asked-questions-about-imagery/>

- *Imagery / Visualization for Healing Diseases/Conditions:*  
<http://www.holisticonline.com/guided-imagery.htm>
- *Imagery / Visualization for Stress:*  
[http://www.holisticonline.com/Stress/stress\\_visualization.htm](http://www.holisticonline.com/Stress/stress_visualization.htm)
- *Creative Visualization Exercises for Success, Healing and Change:*  
[http://www.the-anfield-institute-of-personal-development.com/Creative\\_Visualization\\_Exercises.html](http://www.the-anfield-institute-of-personal-development.com/Creative_Visualization_Exercises.html)
- *Visualizing Your Way to Marketing Success:*  
<http://www.law.com/jsp/law/sfb/lawArticleSFB.jsp?id=1141380313636>
- *Success Lessons from the Winter Olympics*

<http://ezinearticles.com/?Success-Lessons-from-the-Winter-Olympics:-Visualization&id=148344>

This easy-to-read article by Harvard-trained psychologist Stephen Kraus provides a layman's summary of why athletes use visualization.

- Visioning and Executive Success  
Punia, B. K. (2005). Executive personality and visioning effectiveness: A diagnostic analysis. *Journal of Management Research*, 5, 7-19.

***Resources for Guided Visualization Recordings:***

- *Health Journeys*  
<http://www.healthjourneys.com/shop.aspx>

According to a New York Times article, these guided imagery recordings are used in major hospitals and medical clinics throughout the U.S.

- Sounds True  
<http://www.soundstrue.com/pages/search.php?search=guided+visualization&format=all&page=1>

This audio publishing company offers a wide range of guided visualizations covering topics from self healing, healthy eating, and headache relief to ecstatic sex, memory improvement and career success. Most the programs on this link and the 10 other links at the bottom of the page include a guided visualization as part of the audio program.

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